Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards

English Language Arts
Grades 3–5

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with Elizabeth C. Homan
and Sarah Swofford

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I

Observing the CCSS

Introduction

Not long ago I was driving a van filled with middle school soccer players and heard a voice from the back say, "I hate, I hate, I hate the MEAP." (The MEAP is Michigan's state test of math and English language arts [ELA].) I recognized the voice as that of a friend of my daughter, a good student, diligent in every way. Her class had just spent a month preparing for and then taking the MEAP, and she was feeling frustrated by the time spent and anxious about her performance.

That plaintive voice reminded me of concerns I've heard expressed about the latest chapter in the standards movement. The appearance of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has aroused a variety of responses, some of them filled with anxiety and resentment. It's easy to get worried about issues of alignment, curricular shifts, and new forms of assessment. And it's frustrating, after carefully developing state ELA standards, to have to put them aside in favor of the CCSS. As one teacher put it, "The CCSS are less detailed than the standards they are replacing." Another lamented, "How are teachers supposed to have time to rewrite curriculum and realign lessons to CCSS now that the state has taken away our meeting times?"

Yet, responses to the CCSS have also been positive. Some teachers have said that the grade-specific standards are helpful because they provide useful details about learning goals for students. Others have noted that the CCSS can help them address the needs of transient students because teachers in different schools will be addressing similar learning goals. Still others have commented that the CCSS can provide a lens through which they can examine their own teaching practices. As one teacher put it, "Looking at the standards made me realize that I wasn't giving much attention to oral language." Another said, "I think they provide more opportunities for higher-order thinking and an authentic application of the content we teach."

Regardless of teacher responses, the CCSS are now part of the educational landscape. But these standards do not replace the principles that guide good teaching. Some things remain constant regardless of new mandates. One such principle is that teachers think first of their students, trying to understand their learning needs, developing effective ways to meet those needs, and continually affirming that the needs are being met. This book, like all four volumes in this series, is written with and by teachers who remain deeply committed to their students and their literacy learning. It is a book addressed to teachers like you. You may be an experienced teacher who has established ways of fostering literacy learning or you may be a relative newcomer to the classroom who is looking for ideas and strategies, but that you are holding this book in your hands says that you put students at the center of your teaching.

No one knows as much about your students as you do. You understand the community that surrounds the school and helps to shape their life experiences. You have some information about their families and may even know their parents or guardians

personally. You can tell when they are having difficulty and when they are feeling successful. You have watched their body language, scanned their faces, listened to their voices, and read enough of their writing to have some ideas about what matters to them. Your knowledge about your students guides the instructional choices you make, and it shapes your response to any mandate, including the CCSS.

Your knowledge about students is probably connected to your knowledge of assessment. You know the importance of finding out what students have learned and what they still need to learn. You probably already know about the importance of authentic assessment, measures of learning that are connected with work students can be expected to do outside of class as well as in it. No doubt you use formative assessment, measures of learning that give students feedback rather than grades and help you know what they still need to learn. For example, you probably make sure that students respond to one another's written drafts as they develop a finished piece of writing. You may have individual conferences with student writers or offer marginal comments and suggestions on their drafts. Or perhaps you meet individually with students to hear them read aloud or tell you about what they have been reading. Whatever type of formative assessment you use, you probably use it to guide the decisions you make about teaching.

You may have read or heard about the principles for learning adopted by NCTE and other subject-matter associations, principles that position literacy at the heart of learning in all subjects, describe learning as social, affirm the value of learning about learning, urge the importance of assessing progress, emphasize new media, and see learning in a global context. These principles, like others articulated by NCTE, provide a North Star to guide instruction regardless of specific mandates, and you probably recognize that teaching based on such principles will foster student achievement, including achievement of the CCSS.

Because you are concerned about the learning of *all* of your students, you probably try to find ways to affirm the wide variety of racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds that students bring into the classroom. No doubt you are interested in taking multiple approaches to reading, writing, speaking and listening so that you can engage as many students as possible. Taking this stance convinces you that continual growth and innovation are essential to student achievement, especially when new standards are being introduced.

This book is designed to support you in meeting the challenges posed by the CCSS. It stands on the principle that standards do not mean standardization or a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching. It assumes that inspirational teaching—teaching that engages students as critical problem solvers who embrace multiple ways of representing knowledge—can address standards most effectively. It celebrates new visions of innovation and the renewal of long-held visions that may have become buried in the midst of day-to-day obligations. It reinforces a focus on student learn-

ing by demonstrating ways of addressing these standards while also adhering to NCTE principles of effective teaching. It does this by, first, examining the CCSS to identify key features and address some of the most common questions they raise. The second section of this book moves into the classrooms of individual teachers, offering snapshots of instruction and showing how teachers developed their practices across time. These classroom snapshots demonstrate ways to address learning goals included in the CCSS while simultaneously adhering to principles of good teaching articulated by NCTE. In addition to narratives of teaching, this section includes charts that show, quickly, how principles and standards can be aligned. Finally, this section offers suggestions for professional development, both for individuals and for teachers who participate in communities of practice. Thanks to NCTE's online resources, you can join in a community of practice that extends across local and state boundaries, enabling you to share ideas and strategies with colleagues from many parts of the country. Embedded throughout this section are student work samples and many other artifacts, and NCTE's online resources include many more materials, from which you can draw and to which you can contribute. The final section of this book recognizes that effective change requires long-term planning as well as collaboration among colleagues, and it offers strategies and materials for planning units of study articulating grade-level expectations and mapping yearlong instruction.

Voices in the back of your mind, like the "I hate, I hate" voice in the back of my van, may continue to express frustrations and anxieties about the CCSS, but I am confident that the teachers you will meet in this book along with the ideas and strategies offered will reinforce your view of yourself as a professional educator charged with making decisions about strategies and curriculum to advance the learning of your students.

Anne Ruggles Gere
Series Editor

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Demystifying the Common Core State Standards

Some teachers are uncomfortable with standards because they assume that the use of standards implies a lack of understanding about the needs of children or that standards somehow erase teachers' creativity and professional judgment. And, dependent upon how you use them—if standards are seen only as a checklist of what to teach—then they could be right. However, if you view standards as common ending points that you hope to get students to and you understand that formative assessment tells you where all of your students' starting points are (including the reality that many children will come to you already past these standard endpoints), then the need for creative and professional judgments are actually more important and critical. Ultimately, my ability to move all students forward from where they start still comes down to my decisions about texts and experiences and my craft of teaching.

—Katie Plesec, K–4 Literacy Coach

Putting students at the center means thinking first about the kinds of learning experiences we want them to have, and since forty-plus states have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), many teachers will need to think about student learning in light of these standards. First, though, it will be helpful to understand where these standards came from and what they actually say.

The CCSS are part of a long-term movement toward greater accountability in education that stretches back to the early 1990s. In this line of thinking, accountability focuses on student achievement rather than, say, time spent in classrooms or materials used, and standards like the ones developed by states beginning in the 1990s have been used to indicate what students should achieve. Because of this emphasis, standards are often equated with educational transformation, as in "standards-based school reform." Proponents of standards-based reform have differing views of how standards should be used. Some assume that standards can lead to investments and curricular changes that will improve schools, while others see them as linked to testing that has little to do with allocating resources that will change schools for the better. This book operates from

Web 1.1
Throughout this volume, you will find links, reproducibles, interactive opportunities, and other online resources indicated by this icon. Go online to www.ncte.org/books/supp-students-3-5 to take advantage of these materials.

the assumption that ELA teachers can use standards as a lens through which they can examine and improve the what and how of instruction, and the vignettes in Section II demonstrate how teachers are doing this.

The CCSS for English Language Arts and Mathematics, then, are the latest in a series of standards-based school reform initiatives. They were coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to prepare US students for both college and the workplace. This partnership of state governors and state school superintendents worked with Achieve Inc., an education reform organization founded in 1996 and based in Washington, DC, to develop the CCSS. Funding for their work was provided by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Charles Steward Mott Foundation, and other private groups. Each state decided whether to adopt the CCSS, and the US Department of Education created an incentive by linking adoption of the CCSS to Race to the Top (RTT), requiring states that applied for RTT funds to adopt the CCSS. When the CCSS were released in June of 2010, more than forty states had already agreed to adopt them.

In the states that have formally adopted them, the CCSS will replace state standards. States may add 15 percent to the standards, which means that some elements of state standards could be preserved or new standards could be developed. The full text of the ELA standards, along with other explanatory materials, is available online at http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards/english-language-arts-standards.

In September of 2010, two consortia of states, the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium, were funded—also with RTT monies—to develop assessments to accompany the CCSS, and these assessments are scheduled for implementation in 2014. At this point it is impossible to know precisely what the assessments will include, but preliminary documents indicate that formative assessment may play a role, that computers may be involved in both administration and scoring, and that some parts of the assessment, such as writing, may occur over multiple days.

Web 1.2
For updates on the development of CCSS assessments, check online.

I don't have time to read through the entire CCSS document, so can you give me a quick summary?

The ELA standards for grades K–5 address four basic strands for ELA: reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. Although each is presented separately, the introduction to the CCSS in English Language Arts advocates for an integrated model of literacy in which all four dimensions are interwoven. In addition, the CCSS for grades 6–12 include standards for history/social studies and science and technical subjects, which

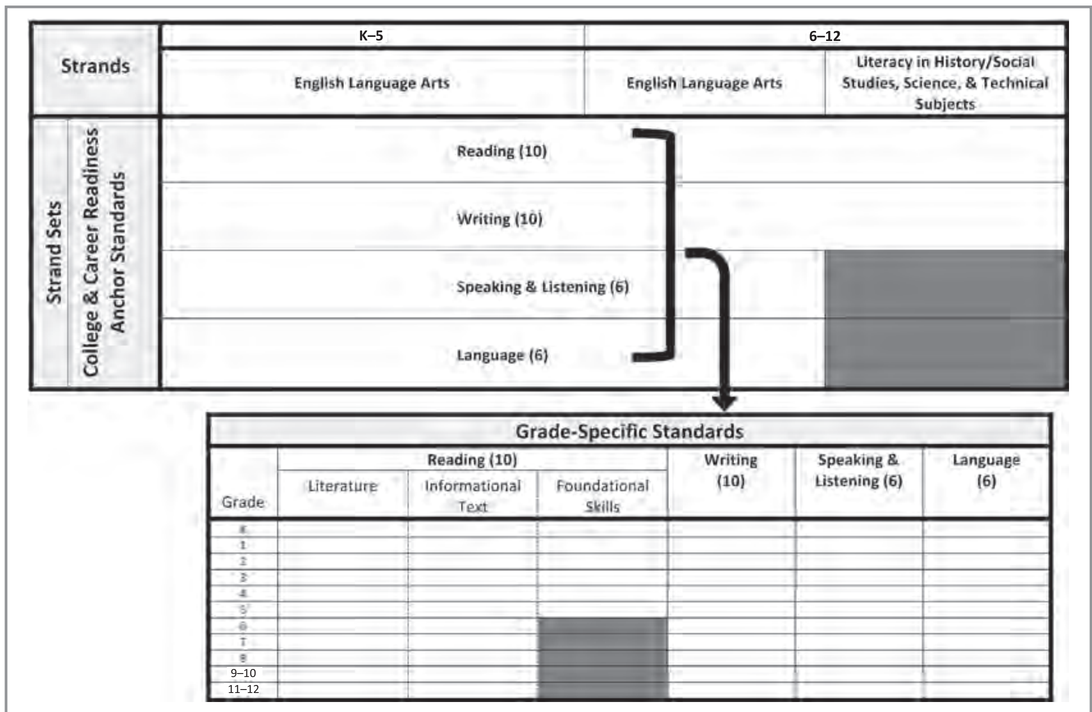


FIGURE 1.1: Structural relationships of the CCSS.

have reading and writing strands. Each strand has overarching Anchor Standards, which are translated into grade-specific standards. Figure 1.1 shows the structural relationship of the two.

The content of the two is similarly linked. For example, the K–5 Anchor Standards for writing include the category "text types and purposes," and one of the Anchor Standards in this category reads: "Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence." The fourth-grade standard that addresses this Anchor Standard includes the following:

1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
   a. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer's purpose.

b. Provide reasons that are supported by facts and details.

c. Link opinion and reasons using words and phrases (e.g., for instance, in order to, in addition).

d. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.

To see examples of how teachers implement these and other grade-specific standards in their classrooms, turn to Section II of this book.

Needless to say, the introduction of the CCSS raises many questions for teachers and other instructional leaders. New mandates such as the CCSS can generate misconceptions and even myths, so it is important to look at the standards themselves. Because the implementation of the CCSS is an ongoing process, and because assessment is still under development, the online community associated with this book provides updates as well as a place to share ideas and experiences.

Web 1.3

What's the relationship between the CCSS and the standards my state already developed?

There may well be some overlap between the CCSS and the standards developed by your state, particularly when you look at the more global goals of the Anchor Standards. Because it is possible to supplement the CCSS with up to 15 percent of state standards, some state standards may be preserved, but generally in states that have formally adopted the CCSS these new standards will replace existing state ones. The timing of implementing CCSS varies from one state to another, with some states shifting immediately and others doing it over a year or two.

There are some distinct differences between the CCSS and state standards:

- First, they are intended to be used by all states so that students across the United States will be expected to achieve similar goals, even though they may reach them by different routes.
- The interdisciplinary emphasis of including literacy standards for history, science, social studies, and technical subjects in grades 6–12 makes the CCSS different from most state ELA standards.
- The CCSS emphasize *rigor* and connect it with what is called *textual complexity*, a term that refers to levels of meaning, quantitative

readability measures, and reader variables such as motivation and experience.

- The CCSS position students as increasingly independent learners, frequently describing tasks they should perform "without assistance."

Will the CCSS create a national curriculum?

No. The CCSS focus on results, on what students should know and be able to do rather than the specific means for achieving learning goals. As the introduction to the CCSS states on page 4, "the Standards leave room for teachers, curriculum developers and states to determine how these goals should be reached and what additional topics should be addressed. . . . Teachers are thus free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards." In other words, the CCSS focus on what students should take away from schooling, but they stipulate that teachers should decide what to teach, how to teach it, and when and for how long to teach it. The CCSS acknowledge that teachers know what students bring to the classroom and how they learn best. Ongoing professional development, especially communities of learning with colleagues, will ensure that teachers have the content knowledge and expertise with instructional strategies to foster effective student learning.

I've heard that the CCSS include lists of *exemplar* texts. Isn't that going to create a national curriculum?

The CCSS do include lists of texts on page 58 that illustrate what is called text complexity for each grade-level band. At the 4–5 level, for instance, the texts include both literary and informational texts. Among the literary selections are *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, "Casey at the Bat" by Ernest Lawrence Thayer, *The Black Stallion* by Walter Farley, "Zlateh the Goat" by Isaac Bashevis Singer, and *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* by Grace Lin. Informational texts include *Discovering Mars: The Amazing Story of the Red Planet* by Melvin Berger; *Hurricanes: Earth's Mightiest Storms* by Patricia Lauber; *Freedom: A History of US* by Joy Hakim; *Horses* by Seymour Simon; and *Quest for the Tree Kangaroo: An Expedition to the Cloud Forest of New Guinea* by Sy Montgomery.

Web 1.4

However, these texts are simply offered as examples of topics and genres that teachers might include, not as specific texts to be adopted in all classrooms.

Teachers need to select texts appropriate for their own students and for the context in which they work. As the vignettes in Section II show, teachers can use a variety of texts to address the CCSS—Dorothy Sterling's *Freedom Train: The Story of Harriet Tubman* and Kate DiCamillo's *Because of Winn-Dixie* are just two of them. The vignettes also show that these central or fulcrum texts work best when surrounded by contextual and texture texts that add perspective and meaning. For example, *The Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan, when used as a read-aloud text, takes on new dimensions when read alongside informational texts such as Ingri and Edgar D'Aulaire's *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths* and accompanied by language study and journey narratives from contemporary society.

What more do we know about text complexity?

In Appendix A, page 4, the CCSS define text complexity as "level of meaning, structure, language conventionality and clarity, knowledge demands, word frequency, sentence length [all in the context of] student knowledge, motivation and interest." This definition is expanded in a three-part model—qualitative dimensions, quantitative dimensions, and reader and task considerations. The quantitative dimension refers to features, such as word length or frequency, sentence length, and cohesion, that can be calculated by computers. The qualitative dimension refers to levels of meaning, structure, language conventions, and knowledge demands that cannot be measured well by machines but require careful attention from experienced readers/teachers. The reader and task considerations in Appendix A, page 4 include student motivation, knowledge, and experience as well as the purpose for reading, again, features that can be discerned by teachers "employing their professional judgment, experience and knowledge of their students and the subject."

It is worth noting that the CCSS acknowledge the limitations of this model of text complexity, particularly for literary forms such as poetry. Quantitative measures, for example, simply don't provide useful information about the relative complexity of a poem. Nor do they provide a useful measure of the complexity of much narrative fiction. As the CCSS observe in Appendix A, page 8, "some widely used quantitative measures, including the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level test and the Lexile Framework for Reading, rate the Pulitzer Prize–winning novel *Grapes of Wrath* as appropriate for grades 2–3." This means that teachers need to play a key role in deciding what constitutes textual complexity for their students.

What does *rigor* mean in this context?

Rigor is used in relation to text complexity. For example, in describing the reading standards for literature on pages 11 and 36, the CCSS include this sentence: "Rigor is also infused through the requirement that students read increasingly complex texts through the grades." Rigor refers to the goal of helping students to continue developing their capacities as readers so that with each passing year they build upon skills and understandings developed during the previous year.

Teachers who immerse their students in rich textual environments, require increasing amounts of reading, and help students choose ever more challenging texts will address rigor as it is defined by the CCSS. This means keeping students at the center, motivating them to continually develop as writers and readers, and engaging them in literacy projects that are relevant to their lives. When students feel personal connections, they are much more willing to wrestle with complex topics/texts/questions. Student engagement, then, offers the best route to rigor.

Will implementing the CCSS mean eliminating literature in favor of "informational texts"?

It is true that the CCSS give significant attention to nonfiction, and on page 5, the introduction includes this statement: "Fulfilling the standards . . . requires much greater attention to a specific category of informational text—literary nonfiction." According to the CCSS, the amount of nonfiction should be increased as students mature so that by the time they are seniors in high school 70 percent of their reading should be nonfiction. But it is also true that the CCSS describe literacy development as a responsibility to be shared by teachers across multiple disciplines, so this doesn't mean that 70 percent of reading in ELA classes should be nonfiction. The standards for history/social studies, science, and technological subjects demonstrate how responsibility for reading nonfiction should be spread across multiple courses.

To reinforce this point, on page 5, the CCSS introduction underscores the importance of teaching literature: "Because the ELA classroom must focus on literature (stories, drama, and poetry) as well as literary nonfiction, a great deal of informational reading . . . must take place in other classes." The CCSS advocate the combination of adding more nonfiction to the curriculum in

history/social studies, science, and technical subjects along with including more nonfiction in ELA. This combination still leaves plenty of space for literature in ELA studies.

Do the CCSS advocate separating reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language from one another?

No. Although the standards are listed separately, the CCSS propose an integrated model of literacy. On page 4, the introduction explains, "Although the Standards are divided into Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language strands for conceptual clarity, the processes of communication are closely connected, as reflected throughout this document. For example, Writing standard 9 requires that students be able to write about what they read." This integrated approach fits well with NCTE principles and with the ELA standards developed by many states.

Formative evaluation is becoming increasingly important in my school. How do the CCSS address this?

Since the assessment portion of the CCSS is currently under development, it is impossible to know how it will address formative evaluation. The preliminary descriptions offered by the PARCC consortium use the phrase "through course components," which is described as "actionable data that teachers can use to plan and adjust instruction." This suggests that formative evaluation could well be part of the CCSS assessment.

This could be good news because formative evaluation is assessment *for* learning, not assessment *of* learning. When assessment helps teachers understand where students are having difficulty, as well as where they understand clearly, it is possible to adjust instruction to address the areas of difficulty. Research shows that formative assessment can be a powerful means of improving achievement, particularly for students who typically don't do well in school.

Because assessments for the CCSS will be under development until 2014, it is worthwhile to monitor and perhaps contribute to their evolving shape. The websites for PARCC and SMARTER Balanced each include a list of the "governing states," and once you have determined which consortium your state is participating in, you can get in touch with the state representative(s) to learn more.

What do the CCSS say about English language learners and/or students with special needs?

In a section titled "What Is Not Covered by the Standards" on page 6, the CCSS explain, "It is also beyond the scope of the Standards to define the full range of supports appropriate for English language learners and for students with special needs. At the same time, all students must have the opportunity to learn and meet the same high standards if they are to access the knowledge and skills necessary in their post–high school lives." This section goes on to say, "Each grade will include students who are still acquiring English. For those students, it is possible to meet the standards in reading, writing, speaking and listening without displaying native-like control of conventions and vocabulary." Based on this, we might assume some flexibility in applying the CCSS to English language learners.

The statement on page 6 about students with special needs takes a similar position: "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." Clearly the CCSS provide only limited guidance for implementing the standards with English language learners and students with special needs.

Am I wrong to think that the CCSS will undercut teacher authority?

Probably. The CCSS make frequent reference to teachers' professional judgment and emphasize that teachers and other instructional leaders should be making many of the crucial decisions about student learning. The implementation of the CCSS by individual states and/or school districts could have negative consequences for teachers, and it is impossible to know what will result from the as-yet-undeveloped assessment of the CCSS.

Still, in the best case, the CCSS can offer benefits to teachers. They can make it easier for teachers to deal with transient students by assuring that they have been working toward similar goals in their previous school. The CCSS can provide a lens through which teachers can examine their own practice to find areas that would benefit from more instructional attention or to introduce more balance into the curriculum. A number of teachers have reported that state standards had such effects, and it is reasonable to think that the CCSS might function similarly. Most of all, the CCSS can

provide an occasion for teachers to consider what constitutes the most effective ELA teaching.

What is NCTE's stake in the CCSS?

Although it commented on drafts of the CCSS when they were under development, NCTE did not participate in creating these standards. As an association most directly concerned with professional development, NCTE is invested in supporting teachers as they face the challenges posed by the CCSS. In addition, it is an association that values teacher voices, like the ones included in Section II of this volume. To that end, the Executive Committee of NCTE commissioned and invested in the four-volume set to which this book belongs. NCTE is also devoting online resources to providing materials that extend beyond this book and provide a space where communities of teachers can share ideas and strategies.

How should I begin to deal with the CCSS?

As the introduction to this book suggests, it makes sense to begin with students because teachers know more about their students than anyone else. As a first step you might make a list of goals for the students you are teaching now. Consider the skills, dispositions, motivations, habits, and abilities you would like them to develop. Your list probably encompasses every standard in the CCSS along with a good deal more. Keep your entire list in mind as you approach the CCSS, and start by thinking about what your students need to learn.

Looking at the learning needs of students in light of the CCSS can lead, in turn, to considering classroom practices and thinking about how various instructional strategies might be refined or adapted to foster student learning. Looking at classroom practices leads to questions about instructional materials and, ultimately, the curriculum. Woven through all of these is the continuing theme of professional growth and development because asking questions and reconsidering nearly always require changes that are best supported by professional development.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) may feel like yet another set of top-down, mandated standards. And integrating the CCSS into the curricula and teaching can, at times, generate feelings of pressure and conflict. But it is also possible to approach the CCSS from a different perspective as well—one that sees opportunities for bridging between good practice

based on NCTE principles and policy and what the CCSS offer. The NCTE community, of which this book series is a part, is one space where you can start to build bridges and frame your interactions with the CCSS in ways that are empowering, highlight and encourage best practices in literacy learning, and sustain the incredible work that English teachers are already doing in classrooms. Rather than focusing on how the CCSS will subvert the instruction we are already doing, framing our approach to the standards instead around observing, contextualizing, and building can help us to bridge the CCSS and established instructional practices based on NCTE principles, allowing the two to work in tandem.

First, one way to frame discussions about and approaches to the CCSS is to focus on detailed observation. Before we can become teachers who incorporate these standards in meaningful and pedagogically sound ways into our practices, we need to be learners who observe and take careful note of what exists in the document and what the standards are asking of students. We also need to develop observational lenses through which to see the standards that will keep students and their needs at the center of all instructional change. Learning about the CCSS through close observation may better equip us to advocate for our students' unique needs.

A second way to think about the standards is to use them as a frame for contextualizing. It is important to remember that, while we observe and take note of what exists in the CCSS document itself, we always need to keep specific school and classroom cultures and environments in mind, understanding how different teaching contexts can pose different challenges and opportunities. The teaching vignettes you will read in Section II seek to display and honor a variety of school contexts, cultures, and teaching environments, but not all of the teachers in this volume approach planning with the CCSS in the same way, and their lessons don't look the same. A consideration of local context, then, must be coupled with detailed observation of the CCSS document itself.

Third, we can see the CCSS as a frame for building our instruction and classrooms and for meeting students where they are and keeping their needs at the center of lesson design and instruction. To build with the CCSS in mind, we need to begin to see them as more than boxes to check off on a list or forces mandated from above that are seeking to destroy our classrooms. Instead, building *from* and at times *with* the CCSS will involve developing knowledge about the document itself, examining and evaluating our current

experiences in the classroom and the culture in which we teach, and relying on the communities around us for support and assistance.

This book, then, is framed around observing the CCSS closely, contextualizing these standards to address specific students in specific schools, and building instruction that integrates the CCSS with NCTE principles for teaching English language arts.

Observing

Detailed observation of the CCSS can begin with identifying where the standards may present shifts from previous state standards documents and identifying patterns in the language of the CCSS document. By looking across the document in this way, you can see some of the most salient shifts. Below, you will find a brief overview of student-focused shifts and instructional shifts that occur in the CCSS document, as well as references to specific CCSS document pages where you can seek greater specificity about these themes.

Student-Focused Shifts

- *Meaning-making*—The CCSS require that students will do more than just read texts for basic comprehension; instead, students will be expected to pull from multiple sources to synthesize diverse texts and ideas, consider multiple points of view, and read across texts. (See, for example, pages 8 and 40 of the CCSS document.)
- *Developing independence*—The ultimate goal of each standard is that all students will demonstrate the ability to enact key skills and strategies articulated in the CCSS on their own. To help students reach this goal, the CCSS spiral expectations across grade levels. Standards for the elementary grades, for example, include language about how students should enact the standard "with support." To clarify, this expectation does not diminish the need to scaffold instruction at all grade levels; rather, the goal is to move students toward independent enactment of standards. (See the CCSS document, page 7. Note that while there are times when the language of independence is explicitly stated, as on page 55, this expectation is also embedded in assumptions about all CCSS.)
- *Transfer of learning*—On page 7, the CCSS state that students will be required to respond to a variety of literacy demands within their content

area courses—ELA *and* others—and to discuss with others how their ability to meet these demands will prepare them for the demands they will face in college and in their future careers.

- *College and career readiness*—Linked to transfer, on page 7, the CCSS expectations articulate a rationale for what college- and career-ready high school students will be able to do. There is little, if any, focus on rote memorization. Rather, the CCSS focus is on skills, strategies, and habits that will enable students to adapt to the rhetorical demands of their future learning and contributions.

Instructional Shifts

It is important to reiterate that the CCSS do not mandate *how* teachers should teach; this is even stated explicitly on page 6 in the document. Why a focus on instructional shifts? Clearly, just as the CCSS spell out what students will be expected to do, the CCSS may prompt shifts in our thinking about how best to help students meet these expectations, which will inevitably affect our teaching.

- *Spiraling instruction*—Unlike some state and district standards, the CCSS do not promote instructional coverage. Instead, the CCSS invite spiraled instruction. Students will be expected to enact particular standards repeatedly within grade-level content area courses *and* across grade levels. In part, this is evident when tracing the lineage of a particular standard to the grade level below and above. Parts of particular CCSS are repeated and built on in subsequent grades. The CCSS are therefore meant to build iteratively. On page 30 of the CCSS document there is a graphic representation of this spiraling idea with regard to language skills, but a similar graphic could just as well be created to illustrate the approach to the other ELA threads as well. For further discussion of spiraling instruction, see Section III of this volume.
- *Integration of ELA threads*—On pages 4 and 47, the CCSS encourage an "integrated model of literacy" whereby ELA threads (e.g., reading and writing) are woven throughout units of study.
- *Inclusion of nonfiction or informational texts*—On page 5, the CCSS set explicit expectations regarding the kinds of texts students read and write. By twelfth grade, 70 percent of the sum of students' reading, for example, is to be informational, nonfiction reading. But as we discuss further in Section III, the responsibility for this reading is shared by all content area teachers. Still, the inclusion of more informational text may present a shift for some.

- *Text complexity*—Page 57 of the CCSS document offers a descriptive graphic on text complexity. NCTE principles affirm the range of ways that strong ELA teachers introduce increasingly complex texts to student readers. These include but are not limited to student interest, genre, language, content, and ELA concepts foregrounded in instruction.

II

Contextualizing

2

Reading Deeply: Themes and Ideas within Rich Texts

Meet Jeff Williams, K–12 Literacy Coach and Reading Recovery Teacher, Solon, Ohio

In this section of the book, you will be introduced to six teachers who work with grades 3–5 students in their classrooms every day. We will learn more about their teaching and how they integrate the CCSS into their instruction. Through their experiences, perhaps you will learn more about framing the CCSS in your context and find some useful ways to build on curriculum that already affects student learning. We will read how these teachers continue to make learning come alive for their students and, at the same time, face the challenges that often accompany integrating a new set of standards.

In my twenty-one years of being an educator, I have had many roles and experiences: I was a classroom teacher for ten years, a Reading Recovery teacher, a literacy coach, an author, an adjunct professor supporting and teaching new teachers, and a literacy consultant in more than forty districts across the country. Throughout these varied experiences, though, I have learned several lasting principles that continue to shape my thinking and my work: the importance of teacher knowledge and reflection, the impact of formative assessment and responsive teaching, the power of gradual release and scaffolding, and the effects of collaboration. Regardless of the challenges created by changes in policy, resources, student needs, etc., I find that solutions come to us through some magical combination of these principles. Naturally, then, I rely on these principles as we begin to work in the time of Common Core State Standards.

Our first endeavors with the new standards must involve teachers deepening their content knowledge about the specifics of the standards. In the district where I work, this process has already begun with teacher teams identifying what is already known and understood by them and what areas are likely to need more study and thought. Here we see great promise in most of the standards and how they are designed to

allow for depth, and here we question the relevance or necessity of other standards. Before we embark on the journey of actually teaching, we are drawing conclusions about where energies need to be spent. Deepening our knowledge of the content is only one component of our learning; we are simultaneously engaged in growing our expertise with pedagogy—understanding the conditions for learning and working to develop such conditions for all students is ever present in our discussions.

As part of our work in the coming years, we will follow a process that has served us well in the past—considering what needs to be taught (the standards) together with how we know to best help students achieve and grow through gradual release and scaffolding. Again, teacher teams work collaboratively to design instruction, creating or finding resources that will best fit the needs of their students. These plans always include aspects of formative assessment both to determine what the majority of students need in the form of whole-group instruction and what individuals need within guided or individual instruction. Formative assessment also helps to calibrate our effectiveness when we stop to reflect on how students are learning along the way and then adjust accordingly.

Throughout the process, collaboration is the central mechanism that helps us deepen our knowledge through collective sharing about our understandings and experiences. Collaboration is paramount in creating the classroom cultures and structures that allow us to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of students effectively and efficiently. We are fully aware that there exists no one resource where all needs can be met, so we work to create our own resources that are continually revised, reorganized, and refined dependent on current needs. Collaboration also allows us to expand our knowledge of how to scaffold appropriately for different learners and enables us to share our knowledge of books, resources, and techniques, and language that supports learning is ongoing and embedded in our day-to-day operations.

As you can see, it is not just one of these principles that is the key but rather the unique combinations that allow for professional development and personal growth. Teachers teaching one another and being open to opportunities for growth and the hard work that this requires is what true professionalism entails.

Beyond my experiences, I see this same passion and professionalism across many contexts and present here some of the stories of these teachers to share with you. Each teacher vignette represented in this volume has aspects of these principles (and more), and I hope that you are as inspired by their experiences as I am.

Each vignette is preceded by a brief description of the context in which the teacher and his or her students are working, and the vignette is followed by an explanation of the teacher's journey because, as we all know, exemplary moments in teaching are the product of many years of studying classroom practice, discussing ideas with colleagues, and reflecting on teaching and learning. Charts following vignettes highlight some of the teaching practices, connecting them with specific standards in the CCSS

and with NCTE principles. Footnotes point toward research that supports the teaching described here.

The online component of this book offers additional classroom vignettes along with questions to prompt reflection and generate conversations among readers who want to deepen their understanding of their students and expand their professional knowledge of literacy theory and practice.

Contextualizing

The way we design instruction with local context and the CCSS in mind determines the kind of learning that will emerge on the canvas of our classrooms. What we emphasize, what we say, and what we spend our time engaged in will emerge in what and how our students learn. So, we are deliberate, knowing that what happens on the first day and how it connects to the last day matters. We are precise, cognizant that the language of learning permeating our classrooms affects thinking.

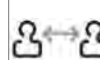
It is our hope that these teaching and learning vignettes and the corresponding materials will serve as a reflection of the language of learning that already fills your classrooms, and that they will demonstrate a framework that allows thinking about not just *what* we do, but *why* we do it. We hope they will remind us that in the layers of local, state, and national values, the greatest intentionality comes from the classroom teacher who enters the complexity and emerges with a process that honors the learning in our classrooms. We invite you to step into these classrooms, reflect on them, and use their successes and challenges to further your own thinking about what bridges you can build between the CCSS and your own instruction.

As you read through the chapters in this volume, look for the following symbols to signal various themes and practices.

Common Core State Standards

Collaboration

Connections


Integrated Teaching and Learning

Honoring Diversity

When looking across the CCSS documents, it is apparent that deep reading of text is valued above surface reading for literal information. This shift is welcome but in many cases warrants more study and consideration. If students are required to read more deeply, what are the qualities of texts that will allow for this kind of reading? Though some short texts are in fact built with the ability to be read deeply, most are not. Reading deeply will require more focus on longer texts with embedded elements throughout that require readers to sift and sort information, question and infer understandings, and weigh and measure words. In the following

Connections
Section III focuses exclusively on the building frame. There, you will find specific resources for building your instruction with the CCSS and for working with colleagues to observe patterns in the CCSS document compared to previous local and state standards.

sections, you will meet two teachers who are adept at choosing quality children's literature, using it through a variety of settings, to help their students do this kind of deep reading.

Meet Katie Plesec, Parkside Elementary School

Katie Plesec is an energetic and thoughtful fourth-grade teacher in a suburban public school in Solon, Ohio. She began her teaching career in Solon in 1999 and has recently become a literacy coach and curriculum specialist where she shares her passion and knowledge of language arts teaching with district colleagues. Katie teaches and coaches at one of the four elementary schools in the district.

The Solon City Schools, located near Cleveland, Ohio, have 5,100 students that represent a diverse population with 31 percent of the student population being African American, Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander, or multiracial. Currently, Solon serves double the state average of English language learners and, as with many school districts across the country, the number of English language learners and economically disadvantaged students in Solon continues to grow. Based on factors related to state achievement tests, such as meeting AYP goals with all groups in all subjects and grade levels, Solon is consistently ranked to be one of the top three school districts out of the 611 districts in Ohio.

A typical K–4 classroom in Solon has twenty-four students that represent Solon's diversity equally. Special education students are served through an inclusion model by a special education teacher who is in the room daily for language arts. All K–6 teachers have 120 minutes of language arts taught through a Reading and Writing Workshop approach, with K–4 teachers being self-contained for all subjects. To emphasize the importance of literacy, *all* of Solon's fifth- and sixth-grade teachers teach their own language arts block and then students are rotated into the other content areas of math, science, and social studies.

Who Needs What? Katie's Classroom

Katie uses formative assessments at the beginning of each quarter to determine the needs of her students in relation to standards. Teams of teachers analyze their grade-level performance on these common assessments to determine what kind of instruction and how much instruction students need on given topics from the curriculum.

With this in mind, they collaboratively plan mini-lessons and guided reading sessions to address the needs of all students, differentiating to support these students within the workshop approach.

Katie identifies that many of her students need a deeper understanding of author themes, and she works to create meaningful experiences with identifying and supporting these themes for her students. Through a series of mini-lessons that span a week, Katie models and explains the concept of theme and engages her students using many formative assessment techniques such as turn-and-talk partners, Popsicle sticks, and ABCD cards. Toward the end of a mini-lesson, Katie poses a multiple-choice question about the theme of a book she has read aloud to her students. Students hold a set of 3" × 5" cards in their laps, each with a letter—A, B, C, or D—written on it, and Katie asks students to choose the best answer and then flash the letter on the count of three. Using this strategy, Katie is able to determine in only a few seconds that the majority of her students have flashed the letter B, the answer which is most correct, which tells her that her students understand the concept. Because getting correct answers is not the only goal of this activity, Katie chooses from a jar of Popsicle sticks, each with a student's name written on it, to randomly call on students to share their thinking about the process they went through to choose a certain answer. Katie also demonstrates, by thinking aloud, why answer C was close but did not express the main theme of the text.

Honoring Diversity

Teachers with learning technologies such as SMART Boards could use polls in the same way Katie uses ABCD cards. Such techniques also engage students in sharing the thinking that went into how they arrived at an answer and helps to demonstrate that there are often multiple ways of understanding.

Each day after the mini-lesson, Katie's students either read independently or meet with her in a small guided reading group of four to six students. Students who are reading independently are asked to respond weekly to a question that usually pertains to their current focus of instruction, which in this case is theme. In guided reading (Biddulph, 2002; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996, 2001, 2006), Katie works with students to guide them toward deeper application of theme in a meaningful context using authentic literature of a sufficient challenge for each group.

One of Katie's groups (which contains students who have had the most difficulty with this concept) is reading the novel *Because of Winn-Dixie*, by Kate DiCamillo, and they are near the end of the book. Katie selected this text knowing that it contains rich language and multiple opportunities for students to notice and note themes with her support and guidance. Katie asked the group in a previous guided reading session to locate a place in the text where they think they have identified a theme. Each student comes prepared with not only a theme but also vigorous support for the theme they have chosen. As Katie listens to the following exchange, she records anecdotal notes to document

Common Core State Standards

The standards place a lot of emphasis on theme and require that students be able to use evidence from texts to support their claims; here, Katie addresses both of these requirements by guiding her students with scaffolded questions.

student thinking about the learning focus of theme and uses the student exchange to scaffold learning:

KATIE: Arrika, did you have something that you wanted to say?

ARRIKA: Um, on page 159, when Opal and Gloria was looking for Winn-Dixie . . . how um, Gloria says, "There ain't no way to hold on to something that wants to go. You understand? You gotta love what you got while you got it." And I thought that was a theme.

KATIE: I think that's a huge piece, Arrika, that you just tapped into. Reread that, guys, and think about it.

Arrika reads aloud the paragraph where her evidence is located. As she does, another student visibly has an aha moment and says quietly, "Oh!"

KATIE: What else could that be talking about?

EMMA: Like about her mom, 'cause when she left . . . and she wants to try to find her. But, um, Opal is trying to find her and she's saying you only have what you got.

KATIE: How do you see that as the lesson, Arrika?

ARRIKA: 'Cause when someone goes, you have to move on. You can't just keep thinking about it.

KATIE: So, what I'm hearing, Arrika, is that you're seeing a theme, and I'm going to use just one word to sum it up [writes the word *acceptance* on the white-board], but I see you saying you see a theme of acceptance in the book . . . you kind of have to accept what happens. . . .

EMMA: Yeah, accept what you have. . . .

KATIE: . . . and love what you have when you have it but understand that some-times things change and you can't control that.

ARRIKA: Yeah.

KATIE: [turns to other students] Do you think that is possibly a theme in this book? [Students nod yes.] Did you have the same theme?

EMMA: No, I had a different one.

KATIE: Okay, let's look at a different one because I think there are multiple themes in the book, but really nice job, Arrika, of giving us that piece of text to support what you thought the theme was.

Each student goes on to give and support, with evidence from the text, other themes such as the importance of family relationships/love and of friendships.

At the end of her guided reading session, Katie has ample evidence that this group of students understands the concept and can apply the concept in their reading. Another group of students who demonstrated a good understanding of theme in the mini-lessons and formative assessments early on are working with Connie, the special education teacher. Both teachers recognize the need to stay deeply connected to students at all levels; they often switch roles, working with students at all ability levels within the classroom. As Connie works with more proficient students, she also engages the readers in her group by requiring them, with her guidance, to go beyond identifying and talking about themes. She uses some of the small-group time to teach students how to write an extended paragraph about themes with support from the text, helping them to synthesize concepts learned in the mini-lesson with ideas they glean from the example text itself.

Honoring Diversity

Some teachers may not have the ability to engage multiple adults in work with smaller groups. However, teachers can still provide this differentiated learning environment through the choice of different texts for different learning/reading abilities or through the incorporation of different activities—such as the synthesis paragraph Connie does here—for different groups of students.

Because Katie feels confident that her students are able to find and discuss themes, as a final reflection, Katie uses an "exit slip" to ask her students to reflect metacognitively on what they now understand about theme and how knowing this will help them as readers. With these student reflections, what she has observed and recorded during the performance assessment setting of guided reading, and her use of exit slips and other formative assessment data (Clarke, 2001), Katie makes further instructional decisions regarding whether students understand this concept and are ready for more or whether she needs to teach in ways that will deepen or extend student learning.

Katie's Journey: Pathways to Enact These Practices

As Katie reflects on her eleven years with the Solon City Schools, she concludes that her career has been shaped largely by in-district forces—particularly by the strong, collaborative professional learning community and the instructional leaders in her district. Katie feels that the ongoing learning opportunities offered by the district literacy teacher leader had great impact on the shape of her reading and writing workshops. Additionally, her curriculum director has been and still is a tremendous influence because she constantly challenges Katie to be innovative and intentional with her work. In addition to her district resources, Katie also relies heavily on professional readings, with *Language Arts* and *Educational Leadership* being two publications that have helped her over the years, both as a classroom teacher and as an instructional coach.

Collaboration

The support systems in place at Katie's school challenge her to continue reflecting and transforming her teaching. Consider what motivates you to do the same or who you might collaborate with at your school to accomplish similar goals.

As a teacher and literacy coach, Katie is continually reflective about many aspects of her teaching: she sets professional goals for herself and reflects on her progress toward them; she anticipates the needs of the stu-

dents or adults that she works with and reflects on her approach toward helping them grow; and she considers research and her own new learning, thinking of possibilities for incorporating them into her work.

Literacy assessment is one particular area about which Katie is deeply reflective. When asked if the types of assessments used now are different from when she first started teaching, and how assessment has changed for her across her career, she smiles and nods. When she first began teaching, the assessments were comprehensive and were given to assess student learning at the end of a learning cycle. Today, there are many different ways that she assesses learning, with more of them being formative—short, focused assessments used to measure learning during the learning cycle so that teaching can be adjusted as needed. These assessments vary in format but all serve the same idea—to help Katie determine how well students are learning concepts and to assist her in planning next steps. She does rely on a few more comprehensive summative assessments, which are used periodically to measure how students are retaining learning, but these are still given with the purpose of planning instruction. As her district has embraced formative assessment, Katie has learned firsthand about the power of this type of assessment. She now sees students being much more successful on the summative assessments because she has used formative assessments to adapt instruction along the way.

As mentioned earlier, Katie is part of several deeply involved professional learning communities in Solon. Her district has scheduled time into each day for teacher collaboration—time for teachers to analyze data and/or plan instruction. Katie considers the work done in her professional learning communities to have immense power in shaping her as a teacher and a learner: "This collaboration is the only way to fulfill our district mission of helping each student succeed. We need to collaboratively develop our best instruction and share our strategies for reaching all students. This certainly helps us as teachers, but students really benefit because instead of one teacher being responsible for their learning, it's all teachers on the team sharing responsibility. This collective responsibility and accountability ensures all students get what they need to be successful."

Meet Scott Hutchinson, McKean Elementary School

Scott Hutchinson's classroom is vibrant with the activities of fourth-grade students busily interacting with one another during a discussion period at McKean Elementary School, part of the General McLane School District, located in western Pennsylvania. This rural district of 2,100 students has a demographic profile like many rural districts throughout the country—lower numbers (4 percent) of

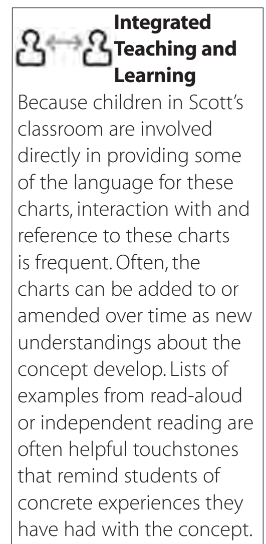
African American, Hispanic, and Asian students; typical numbers (13 percent) of special education students; and larger numbers (25 percent) of students from low-income families. Scott's building has approximately 10 percent more low-income students than the entire district average.

Scott works diligently to ensure that his students are meaningfully engaged and that they are well-prepared to go to the next grade level. He uses technology thoughtfully and builds community around shared experiences and knows that engagement is paramount to learning. Scott has established classroom routines and structures that allow students to share thinking with one another in focused ways and use technology to extend classroom conversations beyond the school walls and day. This vignette exemplifies one way that Scott uses his expertise to teach students about the language and structures of fiction and demonstrates how he creates understandings that go beyond standards to create readers and thinkers.

Using Technology to Enhance Learning: Scott's Classroom

Scott plans collaboratively with teammates to develop units of study for reading—he and his colleagues use a series of lessons centered on a concept in reading or writing that is built using the gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), wherein the concept is modeled first and then shifts toward guided or shared experiences, until finally students can apply the learning independently. One such unit developed in Scott's grade level is about theme.

At the beginning of the unit, Scott models the interactive read-aloud process for his students. Scott has identified many "mentor texts" for this unit, texts that have many examples of the concept that he is currently teaching to demonstrate the concept and texts to be used for guided practice. Some texts are used repeatedly for different purposes across a school year, which allows the children's attention to go toward new or deeper understandings about a literary element such as theme. At the beginning of the unit, Scott reads aloud from *The Fabled Fourth Graders of Aesop Elementary School* by Candace Fleming because the book has qualities that engage and delight readers and because each chapter happens to have a particular theme or life message. By thinking aloud for students, Scott demonstrates not only what theme is but also how a reader goes about noticing themes that can be stated directly by the author or that can be inferred by readers.



Integrated Teaching and Learning

Because children in Scott's classroom are involved directly in providing some of the language for these charts, interaction with and reference to these charts is frequent. Often, the charts can be added to or amended over time as new understandings about the concept develop. Lists of examples from read-aloud or independent reading are often helpful touchstones that remind students of concrete experiences they have had with the concept.

After a day or two of this, Scott begins to shift toward shared/guided practice by inviting students to work collaboratively in what he calls "RW Partners"—designated student pairings who know to sit close to one another for the purpose of think/pair/share or turn-and-talk opportunities. Using this predictable

routine affords Scott ample time for student collaboration, because time is not wasted finding a partner or in getting to the task. During the read-aloud, Scott periodically stops and poses a question or statement for pairs to discuss quickly and then share out with others. Scott has taken time early in the year to build a reading/writing community that uses "grand conversations" (Eeds & Wells, 1989), specifically teaching students how to share their thinking with others, how to disagree without judgment, and how to add into a conversation. Because these routines and structures are employed early and consistently, Scott is able to maximize time in his classroom for these important interactions around complex concepts.

Another form of shared/guided practice is the use of a classroom blog to continue conversations about the concept at home. Scott uses a free format called School Fusion Classroom, which provides some unique features ideal for the elementary classroom. The site is secure, private to students, and free from advertisements. One beneficial feature is that students are randomly assigned the name of a color and animal, like Red Cheetah, each time they post or add comments to the posts of others. This anonymity for students (although the teacher's version shows real student names) eliminates issues of competition, popularity, and/or reluctance to participate due to shyness or learning differences. Another feature allows students to give others awards for the quality of their comments, for example, a Visionary Award for insightful posts or a Scholar Award for informative posts. On one such blog, Scott is able to see how his students are beginning to get the idea of theme represented in his read-aloud from *Chicken Soup for the Teen Soul* (see Figure 2.1). In this example, Scott quickly notes that his students are appropriately talking about theme and that they are supporting and challenging one another.

Honoring Diversity

For teachers with students who cannot easily access the Internet at home, teachers could use class time to engage students in "blogging" as Scott does here. If access to computers is limited, teachers could consider asking students to journal their thoughts on theme and share their journals with others. Students could do this anonymously by not including their names on their journals.

Scott also requires students to use sticky notes in their independent reading books to capture thinking about themes. He routinely meets with small groups of students or with individuals to check on and confirm their understandings of theme, offering feedback, guidance, or corrective instruction as necessary. By recording anecdotal notes and collecting artifacts of student thinking, Scott gains useful insight into the understandings of his students. He also reflects on his own practices—questioning and refining his teaching moves, examples, and use of gradual release. Scott and his teammates debrief and share with one another any new understandings they have as teachers about theme in general or about the design of their unit of study so that adjustments to future teaching can be made.

Scott's Journey: Pathways to Enact These Practices

Scott's teaching career actually began in high school when he realized as a ski instructor that he loved "teaching others how to become successful

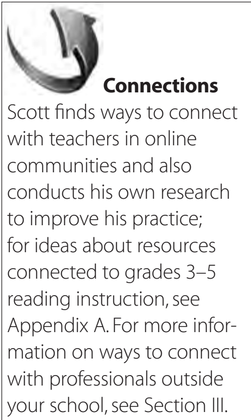
Carrot Chinchilla: I think that the theme is not to lie because if you lie you just get in big trouble then you just have to make up other lie to get out of it.

> **Pacific Alligator:** I agree with you because I had to make up all kinds of lies to get out of one
>
> > **Midnight Marten:** i agree with u, but i want to add on. I think that if u lie someone is going to get in trouble and that is going to be the person that lies
>
> **Shadow Fox:** I think the theme is a blend of not to lye and don't do something you don't know about because Franciso said that his grandpa knew about gardening but he didn't know so that led to lying.
>
> > **Forest Chameleon:** I agree with u because that totally makes sence
> >
> > > **Brick Bat:** Grandpa didn't lie though!
> > >
> > > **Desert Deer:** I DISAGREE with you because, I don't think that you can blend.
> > >
> > > **Desert Deer:** What to mean?
> > >
> > > **Brick Bat:** I think the theme is that honesty is the more important than knowing how to do things.

FIGURE 2.1: An excerpt from students' blogs about theme in Scott's classroom.

at something." After finishing college, Scott found himself teaching first grade, where he says he learned a valuable lesson from a colleague who influenced him toward adopting the stance that "whatever is best for kids is the avenue that reaches the most kids."

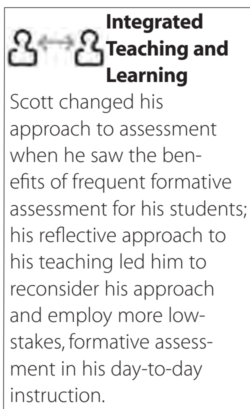
When Scott began teaching fourth grade in his present school district, he relied heavily on the teaching manuals that were available to him—partly out of being new to the grade level and partly out of comfort in doing what he thought was necessary. As time went on, Scott began to question some of his practices and reflected on the results he was dissatisfied with as a teacher. His district encouraged him to read professionally and to have dialogue with colleagues regularly. In doing so, Scott was exposed to the thinking of Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell, who led him to a reading workshop approach that, in turn, helped to foster a genuine "joy of reading for kids." The work of Lucy Calkins has also influenced Scott in the realm of writing instruction—helping him to deepen his own knowledge of writing and writing workshop and, at the same time, helping him to instill a love of writing in his students that complements their love of reading. From these valuable resources, Scott says he went "from teaching based on manuals to teaching based on need." In his regular collaboration with colleagues, Scott felt empowered and believes that "my own school district was a strong factor in teaching me that my opinion counts."



Connections

Scott finds ways to connect with teachers in online communities and also conducts his own research to improve his practice; for ideas about resources connected to grades 3–5 reading instruction, see Appendix A. For more information on ways to connect with professionals outside your school, see Section III.

Scott was also influenced by finding other teachers on the Internet who were willing to share their creative ideas with others. "I talk with teachers in other schools as well as teachers within my school, regardless of the grade level. Experienced teachers who hold the same values as I do about kids should always be appreciated and utilized for their ideas." Listening to and sharing with other teachers have had a positive effect on Scott: "My methods of instruction and classroom environment are always changing. I utilize the experiences of other teachers to open my mind to all options and to help guide my decisions." Because of this openness to ideas, Scott feels his students "get the most meaningful instruction and the most productive and enjoyable work environment possible."



Integrated Teaching and Learning

Scott changed his approach to assessment when he saw the benefits of frequent formative assessment for his students; his reflective approach to his teaching led him to reconsider his approach and employ more low-stakes, formative assessment in his day-to-day instruction.

As Scott's views of teaching have shifted, so has his view of assessment. Instead of testing children's abilities solely at the end of a cycle of learning, in a unit test or piece of writing, Scott is more comfortable with and reliant on various formative assessments. "I think I simply assess more now than I ever did. My assessments are every day—whether that be in my observations of students' sticky notes, or anecdotal notes I've written about a student during a reading conference or as part of guided reading—these assessments guide my daily instruction. Assessments never guided me as frequently as they do now." When asked why he thinks his view on assessment has shifted, Scott adds, "It is all about teaching based on the needs of the students, not the schedule of my lesson plans. My assessments guide me and assess me as a teacher, compared to being solely about creating a grade for a student."

Scott's journey is like that of many teachers—one of questioning and searching for answers, being open to new ideas, and of making decisions based foremost on the needs of students. "I have developed confidence in my teaching and in my ability to back up my choices. It is interesting that, at the same time, I really never have total confidence that I am doing everything I could be doing; I think that pushes me to always desire to grow as a teacher."

Charting the Practices

As Katie and Scott illustrate, how we think and talk about learning speaks volumes about what we value. The teachers in these vignettes jointly value fostering students' lifelong learning and their development as readers and writers. As we illuminate a range of pathways by which teachers plan with this goal in mind, we would be negligent if we represented planning as a recipe with the same steps for all. In fact, our individual planning processes vary widely across time, courses, and students. Figure 2.2 represents the range of pathways, or processes, by which

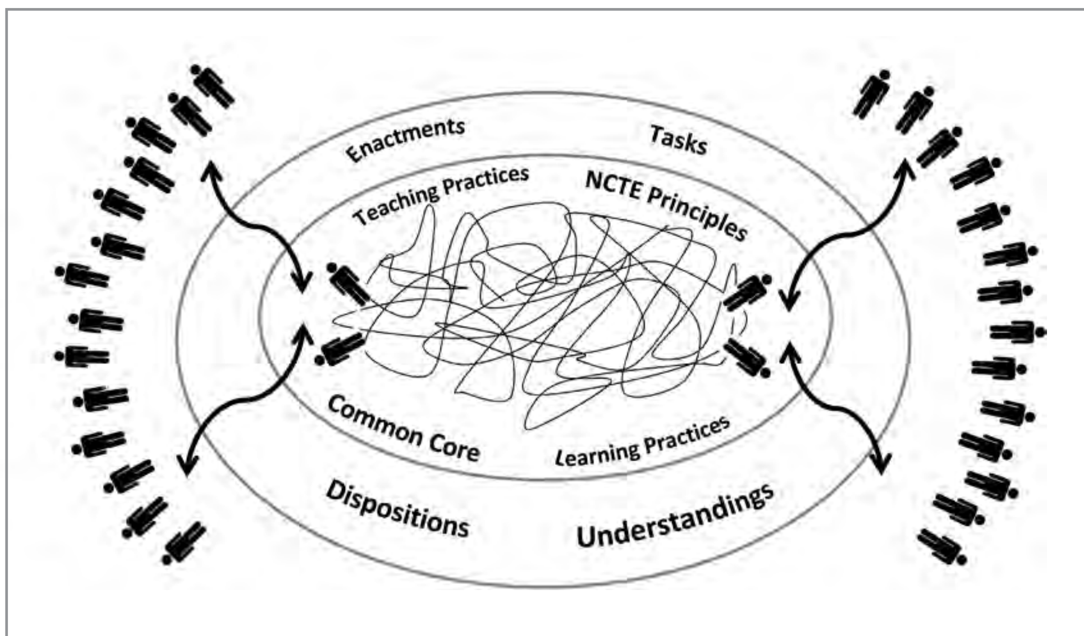


FIGURE 2.2: Pathways to planning and enacting instruction.

teachers consider the integration of their teaching and the learning they plan for students.

Through reflection or conversation, the teachers in these vignettes speak to some form of wrestling with chaos in describing their thinking about planning. Figure 2.2 represents the chaos that we all navigate, but it also seeks to honor the fact that how we enter this chaos—the pathways by which we get there—varies. Some teachers enter through knowledge about their students, which are represented in the figure as encompassing and informing our thinking. Some teachers enter by thinking about the ultimate goals they have for their students; these are represented in the language of the outer circle including the dispositions, understandings, tasks, and enactments teachers expect students to demonstrate or develop. No matter the entrance, once in the middle we ultimately navigate the chaos that involves considering importantly the meeting place and relationship between these goals and the CCSS, NCTE principles, our teaching practices, and the learning practices we personally develop as well as those we foster in our students. The narratives offered by Katie and Scott affirm that we meet these considerations through various pathways differently over time.

Figure 2.2 visually represents the way we conceptualize these inextricably linked considerations that are at the heart of our decision making as teachers. We intentionally chose not to represent them as linear, and one of our earliest versions of this figure actually included the words in the inner circle embedded within the chaos of

the nest at the middle. Given the difficulty of actually reading this chaos, we chose in favor of readability; however, the original visual may more accurately represent why at times it is difficult for us to articulate the complexity of our thinking, acting, and ongoing learning about how to work with and meet the needs of diverse learners. Still, we believe it is possible and quite critical that we work to identify our decision making as well as how we conceive of the elements that inform our decisions, especially as we remind ourselves and others that even as we prepare students to meet their standards, the CCSS do not dictate the path we choose.

We hope that you will keep Figure 2.2 in mind as you read the charts that follow and that you will find at the end of each vignette chapter. In these charts, we endeavor to represent how the instructional decisions that emerge out of the chaos are dynamic. For ease of representation, these charts read more linearly than the processes they depict. But they include the elements of our decision making and moving out of the chaos toward deliberate goals and outcomes. Therefore, our movement toward the CCSS is informed by the NCTE principles about what makes for strong ELA instruction and learning. With these principles in mind, we enact teaching practices that invite students to enact learning practices that will enable them to meet the CCSS. The relationship between teaching and learning practices is key. Our teaching opens the space and makes explicit for students how they can learn to enact particular tasks and to ultimately take on particular dispositions toward lifelong learning.

Therefore, the charts below highlight some of the key NCTE principles about and teaching practices for reading instruction that the teachers in this chapter's vignettes enact, connecting these to specific Reading Anchor Standards in the CCSS document, and merging how teachers expect students to evidence their ability to enact the standards in their learning.

Common Core State Standards That This Practice Supports

Reading Standards for Literature
1. Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from a text.
4. Determine the theme of a story, drama, or poem from details in a text; summarize the text.

Speaking and Listening Standards, grades K–5
1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

↓ How Katie enacts the practice	←— Teaching Practice —→	How Scott enacts the practice ↓
→ Uses ABCD cards and the Popsicle activity as a formative assessment to check understanding of theme. → Uses think-alouds to model her process for understanding theme in the texts. → Uses guided and independent reading to allow students to have the opportunity to practice discovering theme in texts.	Open a space for students to participate in a range of conversations and collaborations, while providing ongoing oral and written formative feedback to help students develop ideas and construct learning.	→ Uses student blog entries as formative assessment to ascertain students' understanding of theme. → Uses think-alouds to model his process for understanding theme in the texts. → Encourages pop-up debates in which students discuss and reflect on speeches. → Uses student conversations, both virtual and in-class, to guide instruction.
↓ How Katie's students enact the practice	**←— Learning Practice —→**	**How Scott's students enact the practice ↓**
→ Those who quickly grasp the concept of theme construct extended paragraphs using support from the text. → Write weekly, responding to what they have learned in the mini-lesson and what they have read independently. → Reflect on their understanding as a reader through an "exit slip."	Interact and share ideas with a partner, with a small group, with the whole class, and with the instructor. Respond to others' ideas and build understandings that take these into account.	→ Sit next to a preselected partner for quick activities such as Think-Pair-Share. → Meet together in a virtual small group through discussions on the class blog, where they can comment and discuss anonymously. → Use sticky notes in their books to record their thinking about the texts they read.

NCTE Principles

To foster active listening, teachers can encourage students to build upon one another's contributions to discussions.
Teachers must have routines for systematic assessment to ensure that each student is benefiting optimally from instruction.

See Appendix B for more on NCTE principles regarding instruction in reading and in speaking and listening. You can access the CCSS at http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf.

Common Core State Standards That This Practice Supports

Reading Standards for Literature
1. Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from a text.

Reading Standards: Foundational Skills
4. Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.

Speaking and Listening Standards, grades K–5
1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

↓ How Katie enacts the practice	← Teaching Practice →	How Scott enacts the practice ↓
→ Uses small reading groups of four to six students organized based on information in Katie's formative assessment. → Uses a student to model finding textual support during reading. → Uses an extended writing activity to help more-advanced students synthesize concepts from the mini-lesson and the text itself.	Provides students with a variety of reading opportunities that allow a range of reading skills to be developed by each student.	→ Uses a gradual release of responsibility to shift students to independent reading. → Uses "mentor texts" to demonstrate to students a wide range of examples of theme. → Uses the class blog as a way for students to read one another's writing and practice responding as readers.
↓ How Katie's students enact the practice	**← Learning Practice →**	**How Scott's students enact the practice ↓**
→ Students answer multiple-choice questions about the reading in the whole-class group. → Students explain their answers to both multiple-choice and open-ended questions using selections of text from their reading. → Talk to other students in reading groups about their understanding of the text.	Talk to others—both their teacher and their classmates—about what they are reading. Practice strategies that allow them to approach texts that range from simple to difficult.	→ Use a prearranged pairing to efficiently discuss whole-class readings. → Use anonymous features of their class blog to interact with their fellow students' comments about the text. → Use strategies such as think-alouds and sticky-note markers to transition from group readings to independent readings.

NCTE Principles

Writing instruction must accommodate the explosion in technology from the world around us.
Teachers should teach before-, during-, and after-reading strategies for constructing meaning of written language, including demonstrations and think-alouds.

See Appendix B for more on NCTE principles regarding instruction in reading and in speaking and listening. You can access the CCSS at http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf.

Frames That Build: Exercises to Interpret the CCSS

The following are some exercises that may help you to individually or as a team work to interpret the CCSS in a way that makes sense for your teaching context.

- *Reading the standards.* With a group of teachers or on your own, look at the language of the reading standards and find specific places where students are expected to examine, explain, or analyze the themes of a text. Examine how the expectations change as students move up grade levels, and compare your analysis to your current curriculum. In what ways might you challenge your students to analyze and articulate the themes in a story?
- *Adapting practices for your context.* Consider ways in which you might adapt one or more of the practices employed by Katie or Scott for your classroom and students. Which practices or activities do you think will resonate with your students? Which practices fit particularly well into your interpretations of the CCSS and your already-established learning objectives? Which practices address areas of the CCSS that your current curriculum does not?

Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards: English Language Arts, Grades 3–5

This practical, supportive book begins with an overview of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), addressing some frequently asked questions and concerns about them. Then, the heart of the book features vignettes of six grade 3–5 classroom teachers from a diverse range of schools, sharing their innovative lesson ideas and showing how they address the CCSS in concert with the deliberate, student-centered teaching and learning choices they already make.

Focusing on such oft-taught topics as identifying themes, making and supporting inferences, determining main ideas, and summarizing, these teachers consider how to accommodate students' different learning styles and offer ideas for instruction that crosses multiple disciplinary areas. Featured texts include *Because of Winn-Dixie, D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths* paired with *The Lightning Thief,* and a classroom blog in which students share their thinking with their classmates. Throughout, Williams and his colleagues stress the importance of *formative* assessment based on student needs to guide daily instruction, as well as time-tested principles of good teaching expressed in NCTE guidelines and position statements.

The third section offers further ideas for integrating the CCSS into your individual teaching, collaborating with colleagues, and becoming—or extending your work as—a teacher advocate.

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