

Analyzing How Formalist, Cognitive-Processing, and
Literacy Practices Learning Paradigms are Shaping
the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards

Richard Beach, Professor Emeritus, University of Minnesota
rbeach@umn.edu

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the influence of three different learning paradigms for learning literacy—formalist, cognitive-processing, and literacy practices on the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. It argues that the Common Core State Standards are based largely on a formalist paradigm as evident in the emphasis on teaching text structure/genre forms for reading, writing, and speaking/listening. It also notes that much of the analysis of alignment of the Common Core State Standards with state standards (Porter et al., 2011) as well as the development of “learning progressions” is based on cognitivist learning/cognitive stage model paradigms. And, it posits the value of adopting an alternative literacy practice paradigm that focuses on creating authentic contexts for literacy learning. It also cites research on issues with about creating false expectations for low-income students in ways that do not serve students’ best interests. All of this suggests the need for further research on the implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Analyzing How Formalist, Cognitive-Processing, and Literacy Practices Learning Paradigms are Shaping the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards

Richard Beach, Professor Emeritus of English Education, University of Minnesota,
rbeach@umn.edu

In this paper, I address some of the issues associated with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). I frame my discussion of these issues in terms of how adoption of learning paradigms are shaping this implementation. My overall position is that:

- The CCSS are framed primarily in terms of a formalist learning paradigm approach to literacy instruction.
- Content analysis research on the CCSS alignment with standards reflect a cognitivist learning paradigm.
- Adopting a literacy practice paradigm for implementing the CCSS addresses some of the limitations of both a formalist and cognitivist paradigm.
- There is a need for research on the implementation process given the paucity of research on this significant development influencing literacy curriculum throughout the country.

Issues in Translation of the CCSS into Practice

A primary issue is whether and how the CCSS will be put into practice in the classroom. A survey by the Center on Education Policy (Kober & Rentner, 2011) in winter and spring of 2011 found that 57% of districts perceived the CCSS ELA standards to be more rigorous than their state' previous standards, while 58% agreed or strongly agreed that the CCSS ELA

standards would improve students' skills. Two-thirds of districts have developed a plan for implementing the standards for the school year 2011/12. 76% perceive adequate funding for such implementation as a major challenge and about two-thirds noted a lack of guidance from their states on teacher evaluation systems, assessment development, or alignment of the standards with teacher education programs.

At the same time, there are examples of schools developing curriculum aligned to expectations for college work. For example, the English Curriculum Alignment Project (ECAP) in San Diego identified a gap between their high school English curriculum that focused largely on literary analysis and English instruction at a local community college that focused largely on argumentative writing (Phillips & Vandal, 2011). The high school teachers then revised their curriculum to focus more on reading and writing of argumentative texts as a way to align students' preparation with first-year college English. This alignment is further enhanced throughout California by the Cal-PASS PLC project (<http://www.calpass.org/Councils.aspx>) involving collaboration between high school and post-secondary English colleagues regarding shared curriculum.

This issue of the translation of the CCSS into practice points to the need for research on how teachers are actually interpreting the CCSS related to their instruction given the fact that the CCSS only serve as a framework or guidelines for curriculum development. As Anne Gere (Collier, 2011) notes, the CCSS should be treated as a lens or framework for productively constructing curriculum as opposed to having them dominate instruction.

All of this points to the importance of the learning paradigms teachers will adopt in implementing the CCSS. How teachers translate the CCSS into practices is shaped by their own beliefs or paradigms related to literacy instruction—suggesting the further need for this research

to unpack how those beliefs or paradigms shape that translation process, translations that can vary across different classroom contexts shaped by differences in factors such as time, materials, work assignments, and “reform clutter/fatigue” (Kennedy, 2010, p. 596).

The CCSS can be translated in a manner that leads to the homogenization of instruction in which teachers teach the same content using the same methods regardless of differences in their classroom contexts or students (Kohn, 2009). Such homogenization often occurs when schools or districts adopt “teacher-proof,” scripted curriculum programs or mandated textbook series that allow for little teacher development of their own curriculum.

The CCSS can also be translated in a manner that results in a fragmented curriculum organized around addressing isolated standards as opposed to engaging students in a coherent, integrated, well-balanced, curriculum that builds increasingly sophisticated connections and understandings between units. For example, teachers may be told to list a specific “standard for the day,” on the board and then teach just to that standard, leading to standards-based grading where teachers check off that students have “achieved” a standard.

Adherence to the Formalist Paradigm Constituting the CCSS

One key issue in the translation of the CCSS into practice is the extent to which teachers will adhere to the largely formalist paradigm constituting the CCSS (Beach, Heartling-Thein, & Webb, 2012). A formalist paradigm is evident in the attention to teaching the structure or genre forms for reading narratives as well as teaching argumentative or informational/explanatory writing based on use of structural forms. For example, for analysis of “craft and structure” of literary texts, students are expected to be able to “analyze how an author structures a text, orders events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulates time (e.g., pacing) to create mystery,

tension, or surprise.” Or, the Grades 6–12 CCSS standard on argumentative writing related to the use of “substantive claims,” “clear reasons,” and “relevant and sufficient evidence” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010, p. 37). A literacy practices analysis of how this standard would be implemented in the classroom may find competing, negotiated understandings for the meanings of “substantive claims,” “clear reasons,” and “relevant and sufficient evidence” (Newell, Beach, Smith, & VanDerHeide, 2011). In an analysis of teachers’ and students’ perceptions of these terms in a college summer writing class, Lunsford (2002) found that teachers and students differed in their definitions of these key terms. Ultimately, the teachers and students negotiated some shared, stipulated meanings for these terms unique to their classes’ particular rhetorical contexts.

Compounding this formalist framing of the standards is the lack of focus in the standards on acquiring digital/media literacies, for example, uses of digital media production tools, associated with 21st century learning (Beach & Baker, 2011). One possible explanation for the lack of attention to digital/media standards is that, as Stafford (2011) argues, the school library community who are often at the forefront of the use of digital tools and literacies were not consulted in the initial formulation of the standards. This lack of attention to digital/media literacies reifies print-based curriculum and assessment in ways that fail to create contexts for digital communication dominating students’ lives outside of school.

One possible explanation for the formalist orientation of the CCSS is that they lend themselves more readily to standardized testing and scoring in that the uses of certain forms in students’ literary analysis or writing can be readily identified, for example, whether students can identify the use of plot structure in a story or whether in writing argumentative essays, they formulate a clear position statement with supporting reasons or counter-arguments. As Todd

Farley (2011) notes, many of the CCSS are quite similar to state standards that focus on knowledge of forms given the need to match those standards to existing state exams. He cites the example of the CCSS: “Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text,” that involves multiple-choice test items based on inferring the “theme or central idea of a text” found on state assessment.

This formalist/structural genre paradigm differs from current genre theories that define genre use as a social uses of genre tools within the context of object-driven activity systems (Bazerman, 1994; Bawarshi, 2003; Russell, 2009) as well as literacy practice paradigm focusing on literacies as social practices (Pennycook, 2010; Purcell-Gates, Perry, & Briseño, 2011). Drawing on situated cognition learning theory (Gee, 2010), a social genre/literacy practice learning paradigm emphasizes the importance constructing authentic learning events or contexts that focus on addressing complex issues or problems as members of communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) or affinity groups (Gee & Haynes, 2011). Through this situated participation, students acquire the literacy practices of framing events in terms of goals, plans, beliefs, roles, and norms; constructing and enacting identities; relating to and collaborating with others; synthesizing and connecting texts; constructing multimodal texts; adopting a critical engagement perspective; critiquing systems in terms of historical, institutional/civic, cultural, psychological, and economic perspectives; and re-designing and transforming systems (Beach, Haertling-Their, & Webb, 2012). For example, when students play a video game, they are operating within a community of practice with other players who follow or adopt certain practices, roles, norms, and goals associated with winning the game. And, students who are novices learn to observe veteran players of the game to acquire practices through imitation. And, as they experience set

backs or failures, they learn to reflect on their uses of practices to change or grow.

Rather than focusing only on the acquisition and demonstration of the ability to employ certain formalist features—for example, in writing argumentative essays, the fact that students clearly stated their positions and provided supporting evidence, is the end in itself, a social genre/literacy practice approach emphasizes the importance of creating an authentic engaging rhetorical context involving addressing complex issues or problems for example, how to create a marketing plan for a new product, cope with an increase in rats or rodents in a sewer system, address the lack of bike paths in a town or city, provide instruction for students who lack basic computer skills, etc. (Herrington, Oliver, & Reeves, 2009; <http://www.authentictasks.uow.edu.au/framework.html>).

Adopting a social genre/literacy practice approach does not this preclude instruction in the kinds of formalist aspects of literacy learning valued in the CCSS. Rather, adopting a social genre/literacy practice approaches serves to *complement* formalist instruction by focusing on creating events or contexts that actively engage students in uses of social genres/literacy practices.

Adopting a literacy practice perspective also highlights the importance of grounding uses of literacy learning within the knowledge and beliefs specific to certain disciplines (Draper et al., 2010; Moje, 2011). As the report, *Literacies of Disciplines: A Policy Research Brief*, issued by the National Council of Teacher of English (2011) noted:

Instruction is most successful when teachers engage their students in thinking, reading, writing, speaking, listening, and interacting in discipline-specific ways, where literacies and content are not seen as opposites but rather as mutually supportive and inextricably linked. When put next to literacies, then, disciplines represent unique languages and

structures for thinking and acting; disciplines are spaces where students must encounter, be supported in, and be expected to demonstrate a plurality of literacies. (p. 4)

The CCSS's focus on reading and writing in social studies and science suggests the need for a focus on research on how students begin to acquire these disciplinary literacies particularly in grades four and five as they begin studying specific subjects, a process that becomes more pronounced in middle and high school. The research question that remains is whether such instruction will adopt primarily a formalist approach that focuses on reading and writing of text structures consistent employed in social studies and science classes, as opposed to participation in activities, events, or communities that involve or employ the use of certain disciplinary literacies unique to certain situations, what is defined as "situated cognition" (Gee, 2008). Learning disciplinary literacies constituting the roles, norms, beliefs, and goals of a particular discipline, it's useful to provide them with activities that actively engage students in those kinds of events or contexts associated with the use of certain disciplinary literacies so that they are *doing* social studies, science, math, etc.

Lack of Alignment between the CCSS and State Standards

One issue has to do with the potential implementation of the CCSS is the lack of alignment between the CCSS and existing state standards. While it could be assumed that given the assumption that the CCSS represented an improvement over existing state standards, then the lack of alignment represents an improvement over the status quo. Alignment research conducted by Andrew Porter and colleagues (2011) comparing the CCSS and state standards finds that the CCSS placed more emphasis on the cognitive process of "analyze" (33% of the standards versus less the 20% of standards) while the state standards place more emphasis on

“procedures” and “generate” than do CCSS, although comparison of the CCSS and Wisconsin teachers’ own goals finds a parallel emphasis for “procedures” and “generate.” A comparison of the CCSS with the grade 7 Massachusetts standards found more emphasis on writing processes/applications and oral communication, while the Massachusetts standards place more emphasis on reading critical reasoning, reading author’s craft, and language study. (It should also be noted that another alignment study comparing the CCSS and California, Massachusetts, Texas, The Knowledge and Skills for University Success, and The International Baccalaureate Diploma Program standards found a somewhat higher level of alignment than did Porter et al. (2011) (Conley et al. 2011). This study found that 36 of 40 analyses found of category alignment, 17 of 36 analyses found that the alignment in terms of the level of challenge, and 37 of 40 analyses show coverage alignment. One possible reason for this higher alignment may be the particular standards associated with these five states or institutions, standards that may differ from the 27 states included in the Porter et al., (2011) study.)

Drawing on his research, Porter posited that:

the common-core standards do not represent a meaningful improvement over existing state standards. To be sure, when we consider state standards in the aggregate, the common-core standards present a somewhat greater emphasis on higher-order thinking. But the keyword here is somewhat; the difference is small, and some state standards exceed the common core in this respect. And, in terms of mathematics and English language arts curricula focus, the results are just as disappointing: The common core has a greater focus than certain state standards, and a lesser focus than others.

What all this means is that the common-core standards don’t seem to build on what we’ve learned through decades of research and experience. The common core is not a

new gold standard—it's firmly in the middle of the pack of current curricula. (p. 1).

In my published response to the Porter et al (2011) report in *Educational Researcher* (Beach, 2011), I describe a number of reasons for the misalignment between the CCSS and state standards. One possible reason for the lack of alignment between the CCSS and ELAR state standards is that, given research indicating that students have difficulty synthesizing complex informational texts in different subject areas (ACT, 2006), the framers of the CCSS were concerned about the issue of the reading and writing of “complex” informational texts, a focus not found in many state standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). Another possible reason had to do with the focus in state standards on expository writing related to preparation for state five-paragraph-essay expository writing assessments (Kiuahara, Graham, & Hawken, 2009), as opposed to focus more on argumentative writing that requires more attention to rhetorical considerations associated with purpose, ethos, and audience than is the case with the five-paragraph essay (Kober & Rentner, 2011). I also noted that the Porter et al.'s finding of a lack of focus in the CCSS associated with superficial coverage of too many topics (Porter, Smithson, Blank, & Zeidner, 2007), may have been related to retaining the familiar standards categories of reading, writing, speaking/listening, and language found in most state standards.

At the same time, I also took issue with the overall content analysis framework employed by Porter et al., a framework based largely on a cognitivist learning paradigm. A cognitivist paradigm privileges the importance of students' use of cognition processes or strategies in literacy learning, with certain processes or strategies perceived as being developmentally more advanced than other processes or strategies (Pressley, 1985).

Porter et al.'s (2011) content analysis of the CCSS/state standards' alignment adopted primarily a cognitivist learning paradigm to analyze “cognitive demand” based on a hierarchy of

memorize, perform procedures, generate, analyze, and evaluate. This application of a cognitivist paradigm perspective differs from a literacy practice framework. A literacy practice paradigm shifts the focus to the importance of employing social practices specific to literacy events or contexts, in which the meanings of uses of literacy practices and tools are constituted by the unique dynamics of those events or contexts (Baynham & Prinsloo, 2009; Gee, 2010; Street, 2005) (For a further discussion of differences between a cognitivist versus a social practices paradigm related to research on argumentative reading and writing, see Newell, Beach, Smith, & VanDerHeide, 2011).

One factor influencing Porter et al.'s use of these cognitive categories had to do with the need to achieve high inter-judge reliabilities, something that's more likely to occur with the use of de-contextualized language categories in which judges could agree on shared, operational definitions without concern for variations in alternative interpretations or implementation standards by teachers. While a set of judges may categorize the standard "synthesize and apply information presented in diverse ways" according to a similar cognitivist category, teachers may have competing interpretations of that standard given variations in their classroom contexts. As Beck (2007) notes, "I doubt it is possible to extrapolate appropriately from the specific language of a content standard to the complexity of language used by the teacher in teaching or child in learning/demonstrating the standard" (p. 132).

Adherence to a Cognitivist Paradigm in the Learning Progressions Framework

One interesting aspect of the CCSS is the use of a developmental hierarchy or spiraling of standards based on *learning progressions* involving increasingly more complex, sophisticated ways of addressing the core standards (Collier, 2011), leading to teachers clarifying expectations

for each grade level and determining the degree to which students are meeting those expectations, as reflected in models such as the “staircase curriculum” in which teachers identify curriculum for achieving grade-level goals (Au & Raphael, 2011). For example, for the core standard related to interpretation of point of view or perspective, “assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text,” there are increasingly more difficult standards for grades 6 - 12. The learning progression for this standard begins in the 6th grade with being able to describe point of view in a text leading to describing competing points of view in grade 7 to interpreting how disparities between reader and character perspective results in dramatic irony in grade 8. Then, for grades 9-10, students focus on how authors develop their own perspective or stance in a text, and, for grades 11-12, how authors employ satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement to convey multiple meanings. If students are then having difficulty achieving their grade-level standard, teachers can then revert back to earlier-grade standards to create activities based on those earlier standards. If, for example, students are having difficulty contrasting different characters’ perspectives at the 8th grade level, you may need to develop activities related to inferring characters’ perspectives associated with achieving grade 7 standards.

One issue, however, with the learning progressions model is that, drawing on a cognitivist paradigm, is that it makes certain assumptions about students’ abilities based on a cognitive stage developmental model, for example, that early adolescents may experience difficulty adopting multiple, alternative perspectives that will be less difficult for late adolescents. While there may be some validity to these developmental assumptions, they lack any strong empirical support, and therefore need to be complemented by a literacy practice paradigm emphasizing the impact of the social context on students’ abilities and engagement.

Issues in Preparation for Colleges and Careers: Text Complexity

A key focus of the CCSS is the idea of preparing students for success in college and careers. This need for college/career preparation has led to the focus on reading of complex texts typically assigned in college, texts that some research indicated students are not reading or if they are reading, they have difficulty comprehending (ACT, 2006a; 2010). The ACT research perceived text complexity primarily in formalist terms—that complex texts are constituted by subtle, complex relationships, sophisticated information, elaborate organization, intricate style/language, demanding vocabulary, and implicit purposes (ACT, 2006b).

The underlying assumption is that students need to be reading more complex, difficult texts in order to be successful in college. As a result, the CCSS proposes a set of criteria for assessing text complexity based on qualitative, quantitative, and reader/context features and set forward different “grade band” recommendations for levels of text complexity for grades 6-8, 9-10, and 11-12. For example, for the 6-12th grades, it is generally recommended that 70% of the texts students read will be at a complexity level for those grade levels, with some texts being even more difficult and requiring some instructional support. This has led to some development of measures of text complexity, measures whose uses have sparked some controversy. For example, while a lexile analysis of a Hemingway story indicated that this story would be appropriate for fourth grade, such grade-level assignment isn’t valid (Collier, 2011).

Tim Shanahan (2011) also raises the question as to whether students reading more difficult texts is beneficial, particularly for beginning readers given the research “suggesting that teaching children from frustration level texts can lead to more learning than from instructional level ones...harder beginning reading books may stop many young readers in their

tracks” (p. 23). He’s also concerned about teachers not knowing how to help students cope with more difficult texts, when teachers may simply “move kids to easier books, to stop using textbooks, or to read the texts to the students; none of which will make kids better readers or learners” (p. 23).

Questions have also been raised about the measures employed by CCSS to identify text complexity. The validity of the use of Coh-Metrix employed in the CCSS to discriminate between difficulty levels and types of beginning reading texts was examined by Heibert and Pearson (2010). They found that only one of five Coh-Metrix measures, referential cohesion, predicted increased difficulty of beginning texts, failing to provide relevant information to match students with texts. Neither system gave sufficiently specific information to match beginning readers with texts. And, in her development of criteria for analysis of text complexity, Wixson (2011) posits the need to not only examine narrative text features, but also aspects of thematic development, alternative perspectives, cultural and literary perspectives, and intertextual references.

Underlying the assumption that it’s possible to determine the text complexity of a particular text is a formalist learning paradigm that focuses on variations in the text features— vocabulary, syntax, text structure, etc. What’s problematic about this formalist perspective from a situated cognition/literary practice perspective is the lack of attention to variations in the purpose/context in which the text is being read as well as differences in readers’ prior knowledge, cultural experiences, interests, abilities, and purposes for reading. A text may have high or low appeal for students based on their own interests, needs, and cultural backgrounds. For example, some of Walter Dean Meyer’s young adult novels that are set in urban neighborhoods may have high appeal for students living in those neighborhoods and low appeal

for students living in suburban neighborhoods, and thus be easier for one group of students to read than for another. One of the recommended texts for high school students, Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, fails to be engaging for most high school students, and may lack relevance for students who have little prior knowledge of cultural context of the South.

The CCSS framers (Common Core State Standards, 2010) certainly understand this, noting in Appendix A that:

such factors as students' motivation, knowledge, and experiences must also come into play in text selection. Students deeply interested in a given topic, for example, may engage with texts on that subject across a range of complexity. Particular tasks may also require students to read harder texts than they would normally be required to.

However, the underlying contradiction is that in adopting a formalist stance of addressing text difficulty by assuming that teaching about text structure/forms will enhance students' ability to cope with text complexity, the CCSS does not privilege a literacy practice stance that shifts the focus to creating contexts that would motivate students to even want to grapple with a difficult text.

Another major limitation of current measures of text complexity is that they do not take into account reading of online texts that involve a different set of literacy practices than is the case with reading print-texts, for example, the ability to select and navigate links, define purposes for locating information on a page, or assess the sources of websites (Coiro & Dobler, 2007; Leu, et al., 2008). The need to consider online reading practices points to the importance of understanding the context in which students are reading as constituted by their purposes and stances for processing online texts.

An example of an alternative, literacy practice approach to addressing text complexity

was provided by Pat Enciso on the LRA listserv that emphasizes the classroom social context in which students adopt alternative perspectives (Enciso, October 6, 2011):

Here's a way to imagine the difference between teaching a complex text and teaching children to actively engage with and interpret the text: Look at the first six lines of the prologue to *Romeo & Juliet*. How would you teach this given everything we know now about strategies, text structures, children's interests, and the fact that a whole lot of kids are in the room? Now imagine how an actor would approach this text—say, a single actor on stage who has to make these lines meaningful? And then imagine what the director would do to make the meaning come to life. That's the difference in teaching the text... and it's quite a leap in pedagogical skill, dependent in large part on the teacher's ability to form an ensemble of readers (community of readers or the reading club as F. Smith described it)...The point about complexity isn't just the text—it's in the experience of and motivation to read the text. We're approaching the text in the way that actors in the Royal Shakespeare Company learn language and meaning.

In this activity, students are engaged in the literacy practices of framing the event and constructing their identities as actors inferring the meaning of the *Romeo & Juliet* prologue as members of an acting community of practice engaged with collaboratively constructing texts in ways that convey meanings unique to that community. They are also motivated by the potential of creating a stage performance for other audiences.

Focusing more on the social contexts also moves to recognize the value of synthesizing and connecting multiple texts to generate ideas. Both SMARTER Balanced and PARCC assessment consortia have also provided their own curriculum frameworks designed to help teachers translate the standards into practice (Gewertz, 2011a). One external review of the

PARCC ELA/Literacy Model Content Frameworks raised an interesting issue having to do with the limited focus on close, analytic reading in their Model Content Frameworks given the need for more focus on the need for comparing and synthesizing ideas through building and integrating knowledge (Gewertz, 2011b), resulting in PARCC adding the following to their frameworks: The CCSS clearly emphasize the close, analytic reading of texts, but there is also an emphasis on extending one's analysis beyond a single source in order to refine understandings of complex topics and themes across multiple texts. For example, the following language has been added to the frameworks:

Once each source is read and understood, students can give attention to integrating what they have recently read with readings they have previously encountered and knowledge they have previously acquired. By drawing on relevant prior knowledge, students can make comparisons between what they have just read to previous learning and assess how the text expands or challenges that knowledge. Comparison and synthesis of ideas across multiple texts allows students to thoroughly demonstrate reading comprehension as defined by the entirety of the reading standards. This type of reading is also essential when conducting research, where students build and present knowledge through integration, comparison and synthesis of ideas. (Gewertz, 2011, p. 2)

This revision is interesting in that it moves closer to a literacy practice perspectives that acknowledges the importance of students' active construction of knowledge across texts in a research project.

Issues in Preparation for Colleges and Careers: Argumentative Writing

An issue related to text complexity is the prevailing focus in the CCSS on teaching

argumentative writing given the fact that such writing is valued at the college level. The CCSS related to argumentative reading and writing is framed largely in terms of a formalist approach focusing on students' use of claims, supporting evidences, and warrants. From a social genre/literacy practice perspective, this focus on the forms of argument limits recognition of argument as an interactive social activity mediated by use of language, genres, and discourses defining roles, purposes, and audiences (Newell, Beach, Smith, & VanDerHeide, 2011). As Marilyn Cooper (2010) notes

Writers are never separate from the rhetorical situation in which they write. They do not study the situation as something apart from them and then create in a vacuum a text that will change the situation; instead, they fully engage in the situation and respond to it (p. 27).

Bomer and Maloch (2011) point to the artificiality of standards related to reading texts in order to formulate an argument about those texts:

A person is expected to read a text and then produce an original text that makes one or more references to the first textual object under discussion. It's a text about a text, a sign about a sign. The language being produced is twice removed from concrete experience, with the first thoughts coming from a text and then new thoughts about those initial thoughts being represented in a text. The writer is expected to formulate a judgment, response, or arguable point in response to a text, then to articulate that perspective with reasons and evidence. (p. 42)

While they note that research supports young students' ability to address issues and consider purpose and audience in their writing, they find no evidence of young students having the ability to engage in the:

complex processes of reading, thinking about the text as a text, coming to a judgment about that text, and writing that judgment with reasons. Certainly no research demonstrates that teaching evidence-based argument in very early schooling contributes to students being able to do it in college. (p. 42)

Shifting the focus to creating engaging contexts for argumentative reading and writing emphasizes the value of arguing to learn in which the primary goal no longer involves convincing an audience, but rather, gaining some enhanced understanding of a topic or issue. Creating these engaging contexts involves having students write for audiences other than simply their teacher; one survey found that only 17% of college writing involved argumentative writing for audiences other than the teacher (Melzer, 2009).

Issue: Students' Future Academic Success

All of this leads to the larger issue of whether the push for presumed higher levels of thinking may actually lead to future success in college. There is a strong need for research on the predictive validity of adopting the CCSS as leading to improved success at the college level. As Bomer and Maloch (2011) posit, the CCSS:

present no substantive evidence that the skills in the standards are in fact contributive to college success, to career, or certainly to “what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century” (p. 3). For them to be evidence-based, these standards would also need to legitimate the relationships among the grade levels.... What is the evidence that doing a particular thing during a specific year in schooling leads toward actual students learning those things at that rate in that sequence? (p. 41)

There is also the related issue that the expectations that the presumably “higher-level”

learning experiences associated with the CCSS will inherently result in students' future success, creating false expectations that ultimately may not be achieved. Porter et al.'s (2011) analysis of alignment of the CCSS with other countries' curriculum led him (2011) to note that:

Curricula in top-performing countries we studied—like Finland, Japan, and New Zealand—put far less emphasis on higher-order thinking, and far more on basic skills, than does the common core. We need to ask ourselves: Could our enthusiasm for teaching higher-order skills possibly have gone too far? Clearly, both basic skills and higher-order thinking are important, but what is the right balance? (p. 1)

It may also be the case that expecting students to be highly proficient in literacy learning such as argumentative writing may be a challenge for students who lack the sense of agency and adoption of alternative perspectives associated with formulating counter-arguments. Tom Newkirk (2010) raises concerns about what he characterizes as:

The universalization of “advanced placement.” The framers of the common-core standards have consistently taken a level of proficiency attained by the most accomplished students and made it a general expectation. Many of the objectives for persuasive writing at this age level describe the work I do with advanced college students—particularly the handling of multiple perspectives on a topic, a very complex skill for young writers. (p. 3).

In working with a group of 12th graders in a low-income, urban Chicago school that required all students to take AP Composition and employ the AP Composition argument assignments, Todd DeStigter (2010) notes that

When I try to help Enrique, Beto, and Naomi as they identify claims and warrants in articles about whether we should abolish the penny, I worry that AP Comp mimics the

means that liberalism has historically used to justify inequality—that is, by pointing to “natural” deficiencies of people’s intelligence, morality, or culture, and by fetishizing individual initiative, choice, and responsibility. In other words, I’m blessed with no clarity regarding whether compelling all Tejada High seniors to take AP Comp democratizes opportunity or whether it is, as Dewey says of the old liberalism, “an instrument of vested interests in opposition to further social change” (54). To extend this analogy to the Tejada AP Comp classes, *what* the kids write, their arguments about, say, immigration policy or the viability of the penny, *don’t matter*. Why? Because what matters is not their ideas, but their mere participation in that *event* of AP Composition. (p. 4).

DeStigter notes that most of the students proceeded to fail the AP exam, resulting in the fact that they then didn’t receive college credit. He’s therefore concerned about deliberately setting up students to fail reflects a larger problem of whether what students posit in their arguments really matters—whether their voices will be taken seriously and whether they are perceived as having the social or cultural capital to be perceived as being able to influence changes in the status quo.

He also challenges the assumption that acquiring argumentative writing practices foster civic engagement as citizens through a critique of neoliberal discourses of individualism and free-market values. His analysis of students’ writing about immigration policy reflects the ways in which low-income students are limited in the degree to which they can engage in critique of larger systemic forces shaping policies in ways that undermine rather than enhance civic participation.

And, he challenges the assumption that participation in an AP curriculum provides low-income students with cultural capital and stable employment. This claim is often used as an argument for adopting AP or IB programs for schools serving low-income students. Drawing on his case-study analysis of unemployed graduates of the school's AP program, he critiques this claim by noting how these students, given their socio-economic status, will always have difficulty acquiring the kinds of cultural capital necessary for acquiring steady employment, leading to a critique of discourses that increased schooling per se leads to reduction of economic inequality in a society with systemic economic inequality. For, example, a recent study by the Pew Hispanic Center finds that while the number of Latinos aged 18-24 attending college in the United States increased 24 percent from 2009 to 2010, much of that enrollment increase occurred at the community college level, which may not necessarily lead to the kinds of jobs available for four-year college graduates.

This focus on the “universalization of ‘advanced placement’” (Newkirk, 2010) suggests the need to balance the call for more academic rigor with a recognition of the importance of students’ engagement and motivation. One assumption inherent in CCSS is that students will be more motivated by providing them with more academically challenging work. Gay Ivey (2011) quotes Eccles and Roeser (2011) who noted the importance of “the design of instruction to cultivate interest, meaningfulness, and challenge as well as deep cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement with the material” (p. 226):

Literacy instruction, then, must not be fundamentally grounded in improving skills, but instead elevated as a tool to enhance students’ intellectual and relational development.

That is a better match for life in college and beyond. (p. 98)

Adopting more rigorous standards will not address the economic inequities identified in DeStiger's research, and, given the direct correlation between poverty and reading test scores (Riddile, 2010), may only "increase the gap in performance between affluent districts and those with large numbers of low-income students. Nor will standards rectify the problems of districts that are impoverished and highly segregated (Ravitch, 2010, p. 2).

Issues Related to the Impact of SMARTER Balanced and PARCC Assessments on Curriculum

Two larger consortia of states—the SMARTER Balanced (31 states) and PARCC (26 states) groups are developing summative and formative, performance-based assessments that are not multiple-choice tests. They are also employing the use of "computer-adaptive technology" that provide estimates of differences between high versus low-performing students and provide questions or tasks tailored to these different performance levels. And, they will be developing ways to share information about individual students' performance with teachers, administrators, and parents.

One issue related to adoption of these assessments is whether these assessments will be aligned to the standards as valid measures of whether students are achieving the standards. In an analysis of the alignment of state standards and NCLB state tests, Polifoff et al (2011) found that about half of standards content were aligned with corresponding tests and about half of test content were aligned with the standards. They also found that 17% and 27% of the content of the tests were not referenced in the corresponding standards. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating low alignment between state standards and standardized tests (Porter et al., 2007; Rothman, 2003).

This raises questions about potential alignment of the SMARTER Balanced and PARCC assessments with the CCSS as well as the new GED test being developed by the American Council on Education and the Pearson Corporation. One assumption in these assessments is that the formative assessments will prepare students and be consistent with the summative assessments. However, to achieve high reliability, summative assessments, employ decontextualized tasks or multiple-choice items that may then be not only inconsistent with the formative assessments, but also with instruction built on students operating in familiar, highly contextualize tasks (Shepard, 2010). For example, if students are asked to write about a certain topic on a summative assessment, in this decontextualized rhetorical context, they may have no sense of their purpose and audience other than they are writing to do well on a test. Further, the potential uses computer scoring of students' writing raises issues of validity given some research finding that computer scoring is less discriminating and produces low agreement with human scoring (McCurry, 2010). There are also logistical issues related to the use of computerized tests having to do with access, bandwidth, and potential computer breakdowns (Schaffhauser, 2011).

There is also the assumption behind these assessments that they will serve as incentives for both teachers and students to achieve the goals of the CCSS, a conflation of assessment and accountability inherent in the NCLB assessments associated with sanctions on schools for lack of yearly improvement in test scores. An analysis of the research on whether the NCLB mandated testing provides such incentives by the National Research Council (Hout & Elliott, 2011) found that tests provide little incentive and, in some cases, negative incentives. Use of high-stakes state exit tests has led to no improvements in NAEP scores from 1971 to 2007 (Grotsky et. al. 2009), and, from 1975-2002, these tests had negative effects on graduation rates (Warren et al., 2006), with more difficult tests leading to lower graduation rates than less difficult exams (Dee & Jacob,

2007). There is also little evidence that the standards movement itself has led to an improvement in American education, given analysis of countries with high levels of success who have no standards (Mathis, W. (2010).

The uses of assessments have therefore often served as more of a disincentive rather than an incentive for learning, particularly for low-income students of color who lack access to linguistic or cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1974). As Stornaiulolo, Hull, and Nelson (2009) note:

Traditional assessments of reading and writing, while widely understood to be neutral measure of children's skills, continue to reward those children who share the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the test-makers... As long as assessments continue to privilege one kind of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1974), schools in particular and the public in general with continue to understand literacy as an autonomous and value-neutral set of basic skills.

Because assessments can also drive instruction, literacy instruction in NCLB has often privileged highly decontextualized learning activities divorced from students' lives (Frey & Fisher, 2011). From a literacy practice perspective, an alternative to the use of decontextualized assessments involves adoption of authentic, contextualized literacy assessments using, for example, e-portfolios, that serve as ongoing measures of growth in students' uses of literacy practices, for example, their development of a sense of agency and voice across time.

Summary

These issues in the current and potential implementation of the CCSS point to the larger question as to what literacy learning paradigms educators will adopt in framing instruction and assessment. I argue that adopting a formalist or cognitivist learning perspective for

implementing the CCSS may serve to limit student learning by fostering decontextualized classroom activities, as opposed to adoption of a literacy practice perspective that promotes students' learning in authentic learning contexts. All of this suggests the need for further research on the implementation of the CCSS related to how different learning paradigms are shaping that implementation.

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