

SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN A TIME OF CORE STANDARDS

English Language Arts
Grades 9–12

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Working Collaboratively to Enact the CCSS

As we have mentioned throughout the book, planning and teaching are collaborative processes strengthened with the support of colleagues. In Chapter 6, we discussed how your ongoing journey with the CCSS will centrally involve the students in your classroom, but your ability to positively affect student learning is largely influenced by the relationships you foster with colleagues as well. In this chapter, we suggest ways that teachers can work collaboratively to support one another and thereby their students.

Collaborate on Literacy across the Curriculum

The teachers' voices represented in this book and our ongoing conversations with colleagues across the nation reveal just how imperative collaborative efforts to understand and enact the CCSS are to the sustainability of our joint efforts. Many teachers—and administrators—are surprised to learn that the CCSS themselves urge us toward such aims. As we discussed earlier in our overview of the CCSS document and in Section I, the CCSS argue on page 7 that students who are college and career ready ought to be able to respond to a range of disciplinary demands, tasks, audiences, and purposes for writing, reading, speaking, and listening. The CCSS inclusion of College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards at the 6–12 grade levels for literacy in history/social science, science, and technical subjects sends a strong message that *with* our colleagues in these other content areas we are jointly responsible for helping students navigate the range of these literacy demands. Therefore, the CCSS recognize what we ELA teachers have long understood: we alone cannot take on the burden of equipping students to become literate consumers and producers of *all* content area knowledge. When some teachers read on page 5 of the CCSS document that by twelfth grade, 30 percent of the sum of students' reading



Web 7.1

Go online for other resources for building schoolwide literacy initiatives.

should be literary and the other 70 percent informational, they assume that this means that they will need to devote 70 percent of students' ELA course reading to informational texts. However, consistent with this literacy across the content areas focus, the CCSS footnote to the chart with these percentages indicates that these targets are representative of students' reading of diverse texts across courses throughout their school day. Similarly, the CCSS spell out that the sum of twelfth-grade students' writing should include students' writing in ELA *and* non-ELA settings so that 40 percent of students' writing across courses will be to persuade, 40 percent to explain, and 20 percent to convey experience. It is therefore important for us to work with colleagues across content areas to determine how best to jointly support students' reading and writing across the school day in the range of their coursework.

Look for Opportunities to Form Professional Learning Groups and Communities

Professional learning groups and communities are powerful locations for teacher growth, development, and collaboration. As you work collaboratively with your colleagues, grade-level band, and department, look for opportunities to initiate authentic, inquiry-driven professional learning communities. A professional learning group can be a place to house discussion about the CCSS, NCTE principles, NCTE policy briefs, or professional books. To help you begin imagining new ways to engage in collaboration at your school, we have provided a few possible suggestions. These various opportunities for collaboration can strengthen communities of learning as they address the CCSS.



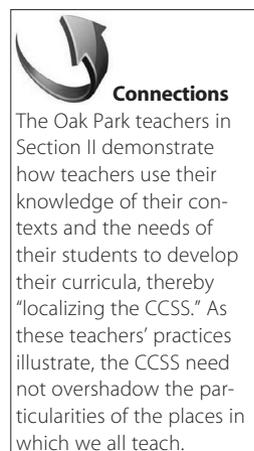
- *Start a Teachers as Readers book group.* Some professional learning communities are designed as book clubs. Members read and discuss children's and young adults' literature along with professional texts.
- *Take advantage of collaborative spaces.* Departmental meetings can be great places to work collaboratively with colleagues. In some schools, this will mean rethinking current views about departmental meetings. Often, with the best intentions, these spaces focus primarily on logistical issues with little support for teachers to draw on their own backgrounds and styles and embrace the strengths and needs of their students, but department meetings can be spaces where professional planning is grounded in a commitment to the autonomy of knowledgeable teachers who make decisions for and with their students. With such a view, department meetings can be places where teachers engage in professional study and reflection that supports growth in the company of colleagues who are wrestling with similar issues.

- *Attend national conferences.* Attending professional conferences is a fabulous way for teachers to find space and support for focused reflection. Through these experiences, teachers share their great work and learn from others in ways that will ultimately enhance successful teaching in their home districts and schools. Conferences support teachers by giving them opportunities to become intellectually reinvigorated by engaging with colleagues from across the country.
- *Seek out online forums.* Online forums are another space for reflection and growth. Participating in such forums, teachers gain insights from across the country as they have opportunities to share their work and learn from others' classrooms. With other teachers, they address challenges, pose questions, provide insight, and find new ideas about practice, materials, and other resources.



Plan, Develop, and Assess with the CCSS

The CCSS document details grade-specific expectations but questions about how students will be asked to demonstrate the standard-specific task of understanding are left to teachers' collective expertise. To be clear, the CCSS do not advocate for particular ELA pedagogy. Therefore, collaborating with colleagues in your school, district, region, and state can help you localize the CCSS; together you can interpret the CCSS language and plan to enact the CCSS grade-level expectations in the ways most responsive to your local context.



Identify Grade-Level Distinctions

Figure 7.1 builds on our conversations about how to read the CCSS document for grade-level differences. This model can help you and your colleagues extend your initial individual thinking about horizontal and vertical alignment in relation to the CCSS document. The figure serves as a tool for articulating how you will ask students to demonstrate grade-level distinctions and what they will look like in your classrooms. By noting in the boxes what language is added or changed in the progression from grade to grade and how this language might translate to instructional choices and student activities, Figure 7.1 can be used on three levels:

- Level 1: to identify CCSS Anchor Standards distinctions across grade levels
- Level 2: to identify the learning tasks that students will need to enact to demonstrate proficiency in meeting each standard

- Level 3: to identify what you'll ask your students to do to enact the CCSS articulated expectations; in this level, together you can identify common formative and summative assessments you might use within and/or across grade levels

You can therefore use this document three separate times or for three separate passes to examine and discuss each focus level. Or you could choose to focus on a single level that offers you a way to scaffold conversations with your colleagues. The textboxes below help to explain how Figure 7.1 can be used at each level.

Anchor Standards ↓	Grade ____		Grade ____		Grade ____							
Reading												
Key Ideas and Details	Key Words/Concepts:	What this will look like:	Key Words/Concepts:	What this will look like:	Key Words/Concepts:	What this will look like:						
Craft and Structure	Level 1—Key words/concepts: In these boxes, you and your colleagues will identify the words or phrases that change from grade level to grade level, indicating increasing complexity in what students will be expected to do to enact the particular grade-level standard. Note too that some grade-level standards language does not change from grade to grade, so there may well be some standards that don't require any notes about language distinctions.											
Integration of Knowledge and Ideas												
Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity												
Writing												
Text Types and Purposes	Key Words/Concepts:	What this will look like:	Key Words/Concepts:	What this will look like:	Key Words/Concepts:	What this will look like:						
Production and Distribution of Writing	Level 2—Breaking down grade-level learning tasks: Some grade-level standards require students to understand and be able to do a number of related tasks. To teach students how to enact a single standard with multiple expectations, at this level, you might consider what each of these teaching tasks would include.											
Research to Build and Present Knowledge												
Range of Writing												
Speaking & Listening												
Comprehension and Collaboration	Key Words/Concepts:	What this will look like:	Key Words/Concepts:	What this will look like:	Key Words/Concepts:	What this will look like:						
Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas	Level 3—Identifying what students will do: Finally, based on what you wrote for Level 2, you'll want to think about how you'll ask students to enact the standard in a formative and summative assessment that asks them to put together the learning tasks embedded in the standard.											
Language												
Conventions of Standard English							Key Words/Concepts:	What this will look like:				
Knowledge of Language												
Vocabulary Acquisition and Use												

FIGURE 7.1: Grade-level distinctions planning template.



In Figure 7.2, we provide an example of how you might use this document at all three levels using Anchor Speaking and Listening Standard 4. The pull-outs highlight further the thinking at each level of discussion. It is important to note that this chart does not need to replace your existing tools and resources for mapping curriculum. Instead, it offers one way to help you think through the grade-level distinctions in conversations with others.

Anchor Standards ↓	Grades 9–10		Grade 11–12	
Speaking				
Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas # 4	Key Words/Concepts: 1st Level – Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to the purpose, audience, and task.	What this will look like: 2nd Level – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present info, findings, supporting ev: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ clearly ○ concisely ○ logically • Use clear transitions and tags so audience can follow org, dev • Define clear purpose for particular audience • Adjust substance and style of presentation to audience 3rd Level – <i>In Units 1–3 in response to core texts:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Present info, findings, supporting ev: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ clearly ○ concisely ○ logically 	Key Words/Concepts: 1st Level – <i>In addition to 9–10:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + convey clear and distinct perspective + alternate or opposing viewpoints are addressed + able to enact these things in a range of formal and informal tasks 	What this will look like: 2nd Level – <i>In addition to 9–10:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Identify perspective on chosen topic + Identify and employ perspective that is distinct from others + Identify alternate or opposing viewpoints on the subject + Respond to alternate and opposing viewpoints on subject + apply all of these items to meet formal and informal tasks 3rd Level – <i>In Units 1–3 in response to core texts:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All 9–10 standards • Layer in perspective taking • Formative assess – group tasks and feedback • Summative assess –
	Level 1— Here it may be easier to begin with the first grade level by writing the full standard or by listing key words. Because of the density of this standard, we chose to list the entire standard.	Level 1— In each subsequent grade level, you might just add what other items are mentioned or in some other way indicate differences from the earlier grade(s).	Level 2— We thought about each of the different learning tasks that students would need to enact to demonstrate successful proficiency in meeting this standard.	Level 3— You’ll notice that we have just begun this level. We are noting what units might take into account which learning tasks. Remember that not every unit need expect students to enact all of the learning tasks for each standard. This is part of the power of spiraled instruction where you can return to standards with increasing complexity over the course of the semester or year or course.

FIGURE 7.2: Grade-level distinctions example.

Plan Common Course or Grade-Level Instruction

Understanding the grade-level distinctions using Figure 7.1 might also encourage you to consider ways to plan instruction with others who teach the same course or grade level. You can focus together on integrating ELA threads as well. We encourage you to consider using Figures 6.5 and 6.6 to facilitate your discussions and plans with colleagues who teach the same grade level or course as well as department colleagues who can help you think about spiraling instruction from previous grades and courses for students.

Identify Common Texts

Meeting in grade level, course teams, or departments to develop units around core, or fulcrum, texts can be a useful way to align instruction with the CCSS. As the Oak Park teachers describe, using common texts can be a way to reorient your conversations toward students' ability to enact learning tasks and you can share common experiences to adapt instruction while still feeling at liberty to pick context and texture texts. Together you can ask questions as you begin planning about which texts to choose and why:

- What young adult novels, poems, nonfiction articles, or other texts could supplement fulcrum texts?
- How can we incorporate other ELA threads in our discussion of and writing about chosen texts?
- How can we integrate digital technology or multimodal opportunities for students to enact CCSS learning tasks as they read and compose texts?
- How can we support struggling or reluctant readers with the chosen fulcrum texts?

Select and Enact a New Teaching Strategy

As the Oak Park team also suggests, beyond planning together, trying out a new teaching strategy in your classroom can be easier when you do it with one or two other teachers. The CCSS invite teachers to study how particular instructional practices support student learning and ability to demonstrate proficiency in meeting and exceeding the CCSS expectations. If your building has a literacy specialist or lead literacy teacher, you can ask him or her to help you plan and give you feedback or you can build a study group focused on action research with other colleagues. Once you try out the new strategy, evaluate the results using joint learning goals and objectives,

and work together to tweak and repeat. Your group can also share your results with your grade-level group or department.

Develop Common Assessments

Level 3 of Figure 7.1, as the example in Figure 7.2 begins, invites you to consider how you might collaboratively identify, develop, and adapt common formative and summative assessments within grade levels or courses taught by more than one teacher. As the Oak Park teachers describe, they use common assessments to review their instruction as well as students' work throughout units of study. Because they share the assessments and the language, making adjustments to instruction in the midst of units and in relation to future units becomes a shared responsibility. In this way, these teachers remain ever responsive to their students' learning needs and ultimately to their students' ability to enact unit learning tasks that demonstrate their ability to meet the CCSS demands.

Share Ideas Online with Colleagues Near and Far

We encourage you to share your efforts and ideas in online professional forums and with your colleagues in your professional learning communities. Because all of the figures and charts throughout this book are also available for your use and adaptation on www.ncte.org/books/supp-students-9-12, we hope you will share your thinking related to, experiences using, and revision of these resources and your thoughts about the CCSS more generally there. Supporting one another online in such a forum is one way to strengthen our ability to help students meet the CCSS demands and to remind ourselves that colleagues nationwide are negotiating similar challenges. You can also find interactive lesson plans at www.readwritethink.org, or contribute some of your own.



In a profession where we all largely perform the obligations and duties of our role as ELA teachers alone in our classrooms, it is critically important to remember that you are not alone in this effort to enact the CCSS. We hope the teachers you've met in Section II highlight the powerful potential of uniting with others who share the challenge of meeting the CCSS demands.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS IN A TIME OF CORE STANDARDS: ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS, GRADES 9–12

Sarah Brown Wessling—the 2010 National Teacher of the Year—and fellow high school teachers demonstrate how to address the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in grades 9–12 while staying true to what they—and you—know about effective, student-centered teaching. The book begins with an overview of key features of the CCSS, addressing some of the most common questions they raise. Section II moves into individual classrooms, offering snapshots of instruction, showing teachers collaborating and making careful decisions about what will work best for their students, and focusing on formative assessment. Drawing on such diverse texts as *Macbeth*, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, speeches by Barack Obama, graphic novels, and *Star Wars*, this section also includes charts showing how the CCSS align with established NCTE principles of effective teaching.

Section III offers suggestions for professional development, both for individuals and for communities of practice. This section 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. And throughout the book, icons point you to additional resources and opportunities for interacting with other teachers on a companion website.

"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."—Sarah Brown Wessling



Sarah Brown Wessling, a twelve-year veteran of the high school English language arts classroom, teaches at Johnston High School in Johnston, Iowa. She was the 2010 National Teacher of the Year.

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