When my master’s class on composition theory and literacy studies began talking about the semester’s readings on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS, the Common Core), students expressed weary familiarity with the implementation of these new learning goals that would largely be defining their jobs at public middle and high schools in New York. Already subject to the state’s own Regents Exams, the teachers in my class vented their frustration, not always over the standards themselves, but over how an exam assessing these new standards would most likely limit their teaching to whatever skills this new test would happen to measure. The teachers imagined other possibilities—communication, equality, democracy, self-expression—that might also be gained through learning how to write. But they, all of whom started teaching in the last five years, were resigned to the influence of the CCSS, new tests, and ever-present accountability through assessment. Three recent books, though none of them focused on the Common Core directly, may...

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help worried educators better negotiate the push toward standards and assessment by reminding us of the democratic and deliberative possibilities our classrooms can be used to model and explore.

The CCSS, developed by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers and released in 2010, establish “grade-specific goals” for English language arts, literacy, and mathematics for K–12 education. Literacy is a key feature of the CCSS, outlining goals for reading and writing in English language arts as well as history, social studies, science, and technical subjects. The CCSS Anchor Standards for the English Language Arts propose that skills learned in tandem with literacy should “prepare students for life outside the classroom.” In English classes, students will learn “critical-thinking skills and the ability to closely and attentively read texts” through “understand[ing] and enjoy[ing] complex works of literature.” And these goals will encourage students to use “cogent reasoning and evidence collection skills.” The overall objective is to promote “success in college, career, and life,” providing a “vision of what it means to be a literate person who is prepared for success in the 21st century” (CCSSI, “ELA: Introduction”).

All are wonderful estimations of what the English language arts can do. When examining the language of educational standards, it is difficult to disagree with their surface values, which often emphasize skills such as critical thinking and readiness. Standards articulate an optimistic vision of students’ potential, and disagreeing with such aspirational language feels antithetical to the spirit of being an educator. The promise of “college and career readiness” in the Common Core is persistent because, as Arthur Applebee writes, “The vision of a student who is college and career ready is difficult to argue with” (26). Who would stand in opposition? Similar statements manifest themselves in college and department mission statements, but the elusive and all-important task is understanding how these grand goals might be put into practice without creating such narrow definitions of activities like literacy that they dissociate other goals such as knowledge making, communication, and democracy.

The written intent of the CCSS was to establish common learning goals while allowing states, districts, and teachers to undertake curriculum development best suited to local conditions. Yet the goals have received opposition from both the political right and the left, as well as, most significantly, from educators. In “Common Core State Standards,” Applebee warns of the hazards of the CCSS, namely an eventual assessment of competencies established by the standards that would undercut richer versions of critical thinking and writing. Although the standards’ focus is on results rather than means (CCSSI, “ELA: Introduction”) in order to allow teachers to use “their professional judgment and experience,” substantial federal funding being provided to test development consortia signals the eventual impact testing will have on CCSS implementation. The US Department of Education has awarded
$330 million in Race to the Top funds to entities such as the SMARTER Balanced Assessment Coalition and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers to develop assessments of the CCSS (Applebee 30; Porter et al. 103), often in collaboration with companies like Pearson. Applebee worries about how an assessment of these standards will, once again, result in impoverished reading and writing practices focused on narrow, test-defined skills (30). Applebee’s critique of implementation reflects a core problem with the pervasive testing culture: the lack of teacher agency.

Why does the CCSS matter to the college English classroom? The moment of assessment and standards is knocking at the gates of the university, if not already here, through the college- and career-readiness agenda and the influence of competency-based education in general education, as Linda Adler-Kassner argues (437–38). English language arts as defined by the CCSS will be the English our students know. According to the CCSS, students will practice reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from literary and informational texts. But how will assessment define these complex literacy practices when, as Applebee warns, writing will be understood as whatever is “based on material contained in the test situation itself” (30)? How we teach English studies needs to change when students have the CCSS-defined ELA as their backgrounds. And our current students who become teachers will be asked to teach according to these standards. How are they being prepared in our classes for this work? College English departments might benefit from deliberations about both the policies that shape literacy and the practice of teaching it in order to answer these questions and consider how they’re contributing to, intervening in, or even actively working against these governing standards.

Though not directly addressing the Common Core or assessment-oriented education, the books reviewed here give us useful insight on other possibilities for education in our assessment-driven culture. Nel Noddings’s *Education and Democracy in the 21st Century* has explicit educational aims but without a specific strategy for achieving them; the collection *Trained Capacities* addresses pedagogical questions in only some of its essays; and teaching is not the focus of Arabella Lyon’s *Deliberative Acts*. Yet these texts serve as powerful reminders of what is at stake in conflicts such as those over standards, over the content of education, and over the ways education can cultivate democratic practices. Noddings and the authors in *Trained Capacities* revisit John Dewey and how he might serve as a generative presence in the current educational and political landscape being shaped by establishment of standards like the Common Core. Noddings, an educational philosopher, treats Dewey more directly in terms of his writing on education, while Brian Jackson and Gregory Clark’s *Trained Capacities* recuperates Dewey’s contribution to rhetoric and theorizes its role in the practice of democracy. And Lyon does not address pedagogy directly in *Deliberative Acts*, but her theories on performative acts of deliberation as essential to democracy elicit questions about how education might cultivate such acts.
What these three texts have in common is a focus on democracy and on how education, rhetoric, and deliberation can help improve our democratic practices as educators and as citizens. When so much of what happens inside K–12 classrooms is not the product of deliberation and collective decision making among educators, but among policymakers, lobbyists, and corporations, we in English studies might consider how our classes construct democracy and our hopes for democratic practices in tandem with ever-present goals of college preparedness, career readiness, and critical thinking.

In *Education and Democracy in the 21st Century*, Noddings deliberates on the current goals of K–12 public education, but her reflections on the state of education are relevant to any teacher who imagines that what happens in the classroom has some connection to the cultivation of democratic practices. In order to answer her central question about “what schools should do to accomplish the larger aims of 21st-century democracy” (11), Noddings combines an examination of the effects of assessment-driven education with ideas about “how schools can help achieve satisfying lives in three great domains: home, occupation, and civic life” (11). Her holistic view of students’ lives responds directly to the “college and career readiness” of the CCSS in which all education is deemed preparation for college and career. The questions Noddings raises about critical thinking and creativity through her reexamination of Dewey encourages her readers to reflect on the purposes of education and how it might affect our greater society.

Noddings’s first four chapters closely examine many of the terms that circulate in educational circles, ranging from values such as democracy and equality to standards and assessment language such as aims, goals, and objectives. Understanding these terms through Dewey and other educational philosophers, Noddings draws distinctions and invigorates more complex meanings. For example, Noddings uses Dewey to parse the differences among these three common terms in educational accountability: aims, goals, and objectives. She uses the words’ distinctions and the various ways to judge how they can be achieved in order to express concern about the “thoughtless pursuit of prescribed learning objectives” (42) and the paradox of setting and measuring unattainable and abstract goals like critical thinking in assessment-driven education. She argues that such an approach has strangled democratic values in the context of the US education system. Heavily informed by democratic theories of Amy Gutmann, Noddings supports a curriculum that actually practices democracy instead of merely teaching its principles. To Noddings, democracy is not a static program but rather an activity that should be modeled and practiced in the classroom. Like Dewey, she sees communication as fundamental and imagines the classroom as a space where people with differing interests and self-interests can nonetheless learn to work together toward common goals. Noddings criticizes the focus on education’s “inputs and outputs” and argues that there should be a “reawakened interest in intellectual
inputs” (10). Even though her analysis is based in educational philosophy, her look at varied knowledges forces us to think about what English as a discipline is offering students and how we as teachers of English, literature, writing, and English language arts are helping to cultivate democracy.

At the heart of her book, Noddings asks teachers to think about “what their subject can contribute to the knowledge essential to everyday life and to the connections among subjects that make each of them more relevant and interesting. And everything we do—selection of readings, pedagogical strategies, methods of evaluation—should be guided by our aims of cooperation, critical thinking, and creativity” (80). Noddings believes that these guiding principles are being stripped away by the top-down implementation and assessment of the Common Core. Instead, she advocates a varied curriculum incorporating vocational interests and a return to liberal arts as an education, invoking Dewey to illustrate how schools could “restore a sense of the intellectual possibilities in manual work” (103) and support a vision of education that doesn’t “force academic studies on everyone” (21) as an antidote to CCSS, arguing that Dewey proposed a “curriculum rich enough, flexible enough, to help each child find what he or she needs to build a satisfying and satisfactory life” (17). Her suggestions for how to achieve these aims—chapters on vocational education, homemaking, ecological cosmopolitanism—might not seem a natural fit with English studies, but her proposals about these different areas provide concrete examples of how material consequences can be integrated into the curriculum alongside intellectual questions. While acknowledging the class and racial discrimination that has historically accompanied vocational programs, Noddings argues that defining intelligence narrowly as academic success is its own kind of discrimination. To Noddings, a more useful and equitable approach, a more Deweyan approach, would ideally entail schools helping young people figure out their strengths and then developing those strengths beyond academic arenas.

Noddings advocates for an uncompromising view of what education could and should be. She outlines some idealistic proposals informed by Dewey, such as eliminating letter grades in middle school or reinvigorating a vocational or liberal arts curriculum focused on citizenship or urgent environmental issues. Using this space to muse on her ideal educational setting, Noddings again invokes Dewey and stresses the importance of interdependence and the cultivation of intellect in all spaces. This can be a startling proposition for readers conditioned to more pragmatic and practice-oriented educational discourse. But as informed educators, we should engage these perspectives in order to recalibrate our own hopes for our classes, which are situated within the highly assessed and accountable world that she critiques. Even though such ideas seem at times lofty, they provide a useful contrast to the current state of our schools, full of tests and focused on academic success rather than on a wider variety of possibilities.
However, Noddings skirts some of the theoretical and pedagogical complications that accompany these ideas. Those in composition and rhetoric might bristle at her somewhat simplistic discussion of standard English as a “universal need” (110); this is probably the most troubling part of the book, mainly because Noddings doesn’t engage any scholarship about how to instruct on this standard aside from “gently” correcting grammatical errors. Though outlining a writing curriculum is not her aim, such moments are somewhat sobering, especially compared to the passion communicated by her aspirations. Noddings is convincing in her argument, but it is still difficult to imagine her proposals as a national alternative for CCSS, given the present state of affairs. But how such ideas can be taken up on the classroom level or the curricular level in, say, a first-year writing program or an English major feels a little more manageable.

In *Education and Democracy in the 21st Century*, Noddings lays out a passionate argument against the CCSS, the era of accountability, and assessment mania that has taken hold in K–12 education. This is not a theoretically rigorous book nor is it intended to be. Instead, it revisits the spirit of democracy underpinning public education and reminds us that this spirit can also serve as a goal. A persistent thread in the book reminds teachers about participatory democracy and “desirability of deliberative democracy” (131). Her desire for deliberative democracy brings into question the role that English teachers might play in teaching it and cultivating it, as well as the constraints that prevent teachers from achieving this role. Such support of deliberative democracy in classroom settings can be illuminated by a more thorough examination of both the core of deliberation and of Dewey as a figure who inspires such an approach.

*Trained Capacities*, edited by Jackson and Clark, delves into Dewey more directly by examining how his writing can help invigorate democratic culture, a practice at risk of being lost in an era of assessment in which democracy and deliberation exist in name more than practice. Dewey, who may be considered the “patron saint of U.S. education” (1), offers authors in this collection an opportunity to revisit and reconsider how rhetorical theory in particular is influenced by his thinking. The book’s title is taken from Dewey’s “trained capacities of control” through which individuals learn to interact in social situations and form social relationships, essential to democratic practice and rhetoric. In the introduction, editors Jackson and Clark discuss how Dewey provides “a rich framework upon which a distinctly American tradition of democratic rhetorical practice can be built” (4), and how they have collected essays to examine both “theoretical insights and practical strategies” (7) and “articulate how democratic culture is constituted through rhetorical practice in the context of the United States” (20).

The collection argues for members of the fields of communications studies and rhetoric to pay attention to Dewey; as rhetorical scholars, they are motivated
by a recuperative goal. Although composition scholars might be more familiar with Dewey through his writings on pragmatism, this rhetorically focused collection studies Dewey’s rhetorical and democratic practices and could help shed light on our own practices and those that we teach. It’s true that Dewey doesn’t use the term *rhetoric* in his writing, a point brought up by several authors throughout the collection. However, the contributors hold up Dewey’s beliefs about how to cultivate democratic culture as a model of rhetorical practice and theory, and his own life and writings as a model of how to support “trained capacities.”

These essays locate Dewey’s contribution to rhetoric in his theories about how individuals practice democracy by collaborating and communicating with one another. To this end, the book is organized into three parts: one looks at Dewey’s writing on science, philosophy, and religion and what these reveal about democratic theory and practice; the second group of essays pairs Dewey with various other writers and theorists closely associated with democratic practice; and the third part focuses on pedagogical directions one might gain from Dewey. Along with an afterword by Gerard Hauser, who shines the insights from the collection onto our contemporary moment, this in-depth look at Dewey and how rhetorical scholars might engage with him today contributes to a larger scholarly conversation on Dewey, but also successfully introduces the depths of Dewey’s thinking to those who might know him more casually.

Only the introduction and the essays in the last section directly address pedagogy, which makes sense because the book’s primary intervention is with rhetorical theory, but the collection’s import to higher education is evident throughout. In the introduction, Jackson and Clark establish why Dewey can be useful to educators, not only in exploring his explicit ideas about the role of education in cultivating democratic practices, but also in understanding how his rhetorical underpinnings can help illuminate the ways in which aesthetics, ethics, and communication work within this process. In particular, the editors write that “Dewey’s conception of communication [. . .] is founded upon his ethics, supplied with materials by his concept of democratic education, and enacted in exchanges of aesthetically expressed experiences that interlocutors can share” (19).

The essays that follow don’t necessarily directly show how “we must tend to the undergraduate curriculum with rigor and Deweyan vision” (20), but they do demonstrate a number of ways that he can inform current theoretical and practical concerns over such developments as the CCSS and assessment culture with his insights on various facets of democracy and education. The variety of close looks at Dewey, including his writing on science, his debates about war, his views on radical democracy, and his influence on rhetorical pedagogy, show that deliberations over how we communicate, disagree, and interact with one another can inform the relationship we want between democracy and education. By examining a variety of
contexts, all with Dewey at the center, the volume focuses primarily on how Dewey enacted these trained capacities rather than how students might learn to do this.

For the most part, the connection to education in philosophy and theory instead of explicit practice is what makes this collection so valuable; focusing on Dewey’s contribution to rhetorical thinking allows us as readers to apply our own educational contexts. In “Part 1: Dewey and Democratic Practice—Science, Pragmatism, Religion,” contributors examine Dewey’s writing in order to understand not just how he defined deliberation, but how he enacted it in his writing. In “Dewey on Science, Deliberation and the Sociology of Rhetoric,” William Keith and Robert Danisch offer a way of looking at the rhetoric of science through Dewey that is informed by a “uniquely American” context. For them, Dewey’s pragmatism and way of viewing communication is a “sociology of rhetoric” (28) that describes scientific knowledge making within the democratic American context, one in which science is made through and is reflective of community and deliberation. The authors make a good case (as does the entire volume) for why rhetoric can be brought into Dewey, and they see his descriptions of communication and deliberation as part of how science is made.

Establishing Dewey as a model for communication is also the approach for “Minister of Democracy: John Dewey, Religious Rhetoric, and the Great Community,” wherein Paul Stob offers a clear-eyed examination of Dewey’s powerful use of religious rhetoric to argue for democracy and religion’s place in helping to create the Great Community. A testament to the strength of this particular chapter is its utility even for those who aren’t engaged in religious rhetoric. Stob’s analysis provides a powerful example of how we might interact with one another, a Deweyan take on when we want to communicate with those who are far away from us politically but who we might consider part of our community and fellow citizens.

Essays in “Part II: Dewey and His Interlocutors” examine the influence, interplay, and dialogue between Dewey and five other writers commonly associated with democratic practice and culture. Some of the authors, such as Jeremy Engels on Thomas Jefferson, Keith Gilyard on W. E. B. DuBois, or Walton Muyumba on James Baldwin, trace theoretical or philosophical connections between Dewey and the other writers. Other authors, such as Louise Knight on Jane Addams or Jean Goodwin on Walter Lippmann, look at archival materials to understand how Dewey enacted deliberation as an interlocutor. Much like the previous section, these chapters turn to practice of rhetoric to establish a Deweyan rhetorical theory in an attempt to overcome the absence of more direct writing on rhetoric from Dewey himself. The Addams and the Lippmann chapters both cover Dewey’s views on war and make a nice pairing in that they show how Dewey engaged in deliberations over controversial issues with peers, offering concrete examples of his rhetorical practices.
Though the connections between Dewey and writers such as DuBois or Jefferson aren’t made directly through archival material, there is merit in following their shared values of democratic thought. For instance, Gilyard identifies key moments when DuBois and Dewey responded to the same events, “striking the balance that would characterize their relationship as they circled each other in political groups and in the public sphere over the ensuing decades” (130). Following the philosophical connections between Dewey and DuBois in the way they both imagined democratic education illuminates where there are similarities and where there are tensions along racial concerns, a project particularly important because it demonstrates how racial justice in education is inextricably tied to a liberal education conceived in more general terms. As Muyumba writes in his essay on Dewey and Baldwin, such nonarchival projects “illustrate the intellectual links between their ideals of radical democracy” (161). These kinds of ties situate Dewey within a larger democratic project that addresses issues of women and race, as well as other major debates of his time.

These dialogue chapters animate Dewey’s thinking among peers, among thinkers, and among controversies, and we are reminded of how Dewey responded to the world around him. Close readings of Dewey’s published writings as well as archival documents that span his views on war, emerging technocratic society, inequality, education, and public critique provide guidance for how we should be thinking about our own democratic practices and how we might teach them. For instance, Goodwin’s reexamination of the Dewey-Lippmann debates offers a relevant look at the possibilities for the democratic education project today, taking up the questions of money and influence that are prevalent in the CCSS debates. In many ways, the core disagreement is over whether there is a role for idealism. Goodwin questions whether Dewey’s theories about the power of communication can still exist in the managed, corporatized world that Lippmann projects. Goodwin’s examination of outsiders and insiders, experts and laypeople, through Dewey and Lippmann, provides insight for today, when insiders are increasingly the same, often moneyed, people who control the debates and the policies (for example, Bill Gates, David Coleman from the College Board, the Lumina Foundation, and textbook publishers) and outsiders have little power (for example, teachers, students, and local administrators). Such acknowledgment moves us toward a place where it is possible to address these inequities and the potential role educators can and need to play in this process.

“Part III: Dewey as Teacher of Rhetoric” offers the most pedagogically direct pieces in this volume, and for that reason, they might feel the most familiar to those in English studies. The authors use their integration of rhetorical theory to provide an enlivened approach to education, which feels like a logical and necessary conclusion to the collection. Through pedagogy, these essays animate the principles of democratic practice analyzed in the rest of the volume’s close study of Dewey. For example, Nathan Crick’s essay examines how sophistical rhetoric and educational spaces for
inquiry can support a healthy civic life. He argues that such spaces are necessary in order to teach “habits of mind by which citizens approached problematic situations and came to collective judgments” (191). And in “Dewey’s Progressive Pedagogy for Rhetorical Instruction: Teaching Argument in a Nonfoundational Framework,” Donald Jones explains how the usual goals of teaching argument to undergraduates can be aligned with Dewey’s progressive education to emphasize interaction among individuals. Jones critiques the pervasive foundationalism in education, arguing that knowledge should not be seen as a “brick” that is passed to students. He implores educators to resist this notion, one cultivated by K–12 assessment culture, in favor of a progressive approach that “will teach students to construct knowledge, examine language, and achieve agency” (218). With their focus on argument and “habits of mind,” these essays advocate a Dewey-inflected rhetorical education in which rhetoric is not a brick but a way to engage students in actively making, understanding, and analyzing arguments. Though the stated goals of the CCSS support this kind of thinking with its “spiraling” competencies and assessments that break down larger values into assessable smaller goals, the essays in this section provide a more complex view of the process of cultivating students’ engagement and intellectual curiosity.

In the afterword, Gerard Hauser revisits the goals set out by Jackson and Clark in the introduction and thinks about them in relation to our contemporary “shifting paradigms for public policy” (234); he asks “whether Dewey remains relevant to the contemporary realities of governmentality in a technologically sophisticated society” (234). With his use of Giorgio Agamben’s state of exception, Hauser responds to the challenges of creating meaningful political dialogue and trust among interlocutors. He believes that the trust necessary for this kind of communication is scarce, but in the face of extreme partisanship, “engaging in rhetoric provides the framework for mutual experience so essential for a public (as distinct from an interest group or an enclave of the wholly-knowing) to emerge” (243). The value of Jackson and Clark’s collection is in the way it revisits Dewey to construct this kind of framework for mutual experience, one that emphasizes rhetoric and democratic practice. Dewey is not so much a solution as an inspiration to act, reflect, and consider how to respond. Jackson and Clark hope that through this kind of examination of Dewey, we will learn that “the more experiences we give students to inhabit and respond to rhetorical situations, the better they will develop the trained capacities necessary for social power” (20). This kind of reasoned consideration is what the CCSS purports to elicit from students, yet simultaneously stymies with its plans for such a narrowly focused assessment.

Of the three books reviewed here, Lyon’s *Deliberative Acts* might not have the most obvious educational approach, yet it most deeply develops how individuals gain the capacities to speak to one another toward the cultivation of democracy. Lyon’s book is the most challenging of the three to what we imagine as a demo-
cratic practice, namely the common turn to persuasion and the awarding of rights. Lyon aims to develop “a new approach to deliberation, focusing on performatives, performances, and performativity as transformative in the contingency and diversity of deliberations” (7). Her exacting look at deliberation as performative avoids the blind spots she identifies in deliberative democracy, that is, the focus on consensus and procedure and the privileging of persuasion. She conceives of the practice of deliberation against “the frameworks of persuasion, identification, and procedural democracy,” in that she focuses on how deliberation, as constituted through performative acts, helps create recognition between interlocutors. Particularly in light of conflicts due to factors such as culture, economics, and gender, it is in this space of recognition that Lyon imagines rights, but more importantly recognition, being constructed most fruitfully.

In the introduction and the first chapter, “Defining Deliberative Space: Rethinking Persuasion, Position, and Identification,” Lyon critiques rhetorical traditions of deliberation, examining Aristotelian rhetoric and its emphasis on outcomes, persuasion, and audience. She offers the Confucian concept of remonstration as a way to complicate how an interlocutor might interact with an audience. This theoretically rich look at the traditional assumptions about deliberation opens up a wide range of possibilities, particularly for the performative, through theorists such as J. L. Austin, Judith Butler, and Hannah Arendt. With her focus on human rights and the deliberations over them, Lyon turns to the concept of recognition, which she defines as “more than the condition of seeing and being seen” (49) and the “actual performance as mutuality in a shared lifeworld” (49), as necessary elements of deliberation. In other words, Lyon turns to the right of engagement as opposed to the legal granting of rights, a difference underscoring how power, politics, and mere identification can get washed away in more traditional thinking about deliberation. Lyon thus redefines deliberative democracy by examining how performative acts help individuals achieve the right of engagement and recognition.

Although Lyon’s book is of primary value to rhetorical scholars who want to take a deep dive into the theories of deliberation, Deliberative Acts also speaks to those interested in transnationalism, democracy, citizenship, and human rights, because she uses these moments in recent history as her objects of analysis. Chapters on “Performative Deliberation and the Narratable Who,” “Narrating Rights, Creating Agents: Missing Women in U.S. Media” and “The Beauty of Arendt’s Lies: Menchú’s Political Strategy” provide examples of the performativity of deliberative acts. For example, the analysis of Libyan lawyer Eman al-Obeidi’s captivity and assault by Gaddafi soldiers provides a space for Lyon to examine the speech act, the limits to giving witness, and the focus on embodied performance, which expands the set of conditions in which deliberative acts can be performed. The disruption by al-Obeidi when she addressed Western journalists brings to light the connection
between who is narrating and who is being recognized in deliberations. To Lyon, al-Obeidi focuses on the “constituting power of recognition and relationship” (84) when it comes to rights deliberations. This theoretically complex look at al-Obeidi shows how she “switches discursive tools in an effort to establish spaces for deliberation” (102). In the subsequent chapter, Lyon uses this foundation of recognition to analyze US media depictions of China’s birth policies and illustrate how it “fails to represent Chinese women with the kind of consciousness that would encourage Americans to imagine their participation in the formation of a world more just to women” (114). Understanding deliberation as performative and reconceiving of agency as a navigation of narratability both seem necessary in order to respond to the current atmosphere of deliberation in spaces where power, money, and geopolitics often define the granting of rights.

Perhaps the most poignant of Lyon’s chapters is the one regarding Rigoberta Menchu because the use of lies seems particularly relevant in our starkly partisan times. As Lyon argues, “truth is not an innate quality or requirement of political discourse in and of itself” (128), thereby changing how lies and truth can be defined and used in political discourse and in public debates. On truth, for example, she writes that “rhetorical criteria for an utterance’s validity might be based in that utterance’s relationship to how a community is constructed, legitimized, maintained, protected, and extended, rather than whether it is empirically true” (129). Such expectations for validity and its attendant deliberations illustrate how an utterance can be judged on more than its empirical truthiness, upending the idea that only the empirically true can hold truth. Through Arendt’s concept of factual truth, Lyon uses the Menchu case to illustrate the lie as performative and also to illustrate its strategic use. She looks at the debates that surround lies to demonstrate how this is the case—and specifically how Menchu’s lies facilitated human rights deliberation. Here, the previously discussed concepts of recognition and what it means to judge, speak to one another, and have agency come into play.

When Lyon examines the women’s suffrage movement in “Voting like a Girl: Declarations, Paradoxes of Deliberation, and Embodied Citizens as a Difference in Kind,” she uses historical distance in order to develop “the deliberative dynamics of paradoxes within the particular politics of human rights propositions” (153) and investigates the use of paradoxes as discursive resources for deliberation. In the suffrage case, the paradox of citizenship and personhood is evident when considering constituting language such as “we” in the Declaration of Independence. Lyon examines the performance of voting as a deliberative strategy, the paradox of performing citizenship while not having voting rights, as a space to create deliberation. To Lyon, “the acts themselves and their publicity created new norms and citizens in dresses, not just for the voters, but for all those who witnessed, aided, and obstructed voting” (172). Thus the performative act of voting, even if it wasn’t legal, had the
effect of normalizing the activity, a “manipulation of the paradoxes and ambiguities of the Constitution to find an embodied presence with which to act” (175). Such an act allows a reconstitution of the concept of citizen, and it is this acting of political participation, not bestowing of status, that “marks a legal status and a practice” (177). This shifts agency away from the governing body and to citizens. As Lyon states, “[H]uman rights are not universal, nor are they simply a matter of writing laws; they need local translation and cultural imprint to be enacted by citizens who are agents, capable of navigating as well as resisting norms” (179). In favor of deliberation instead of persuasion, Lyon wants to advocate for an understanding of openness and considerations of the future. Persuasion has an ending point, the time when one side wins and the other acquiesces, while deliberation has an “infinite progression and regression” (180) that Lyon says can be alarming but simultaneously necessary in order to see a world that can make and remake itself through deliberation.

This historical example, along with the previous chapters, provides models for how we might analyze human rights deliberations and the construction of human rights. But Lyon also provides a model for understanding deliberation, particularly when it comes to thinking about domestic political action or, on an even smaller scale, the deliberations that might take place in and about our own classrooms. Lyon’s complex and urgent work displays impressive theoretical and rhetorical resources, and she uses them deftly to illustrate how choosing deliberative acts over persuasion can help us analyze moments of deep rhetorical violence and illuminate possibilities for interlocutors.

In her introduction, Lyon states that she wants the book to answer questions like these: “How do diverse people recognize and respond to each other while respecting differences of being and knowing? Can citizens recognize and engage each other to create global justice, or are they trapped in home discourses, demanding institutions, and material, historical, and cultural circumstances that primarily benefit elites? What are their responsibilities to each other?” (8). Such questions can also be generative in an educational context and be addressed to a version of what English studies can do. Particularly in this urgent time when so much of what happens in educational circles is truly undemocratic, we need this reminder. It is difficult to read each of these three books and not consider how the issues discussed impact or illuminate our present moment—Ferguson, the Common Core, Citizens United, Occupy Wall Street. US democracy and its attendant freedoms, responsibilities, and possibilities feel like they’re being assaulted in the face of a near oligarchic turn to a corporatized and militarized society. What can the discipline of English studies in the United States do in the face of yawning partisanship, a global situation that leaves most feeling powerless or disconnected, and an educational system that can be charged with contributing to the growing inequity in this country? Can the small
corner of society called the English classroom effect any useful changes in the face of these structural barriers?

In connecting Lyon’s book to the US higher educational system, I do not intend to diminish her discussion of human rights and the ways nation-states and other cultural bodies negotiate such rights. The connection I make between the two spaces—that of human rights and that of education—is not merely to say that education is a human right. Instead, I see Lyon’s views on deliberation and recognition as essential to teachers. Educative spaces are where we might learn to enact and understand these kinds of deliberative acts, ones that allow us to recognize one another. Given developments such as the transnationalization of US higher education, the long project of equality in composition and rhetoric, and the previously discussed CCSS, educators might also use Lyon’s book to influence our own engagement in deliberation about our classroom spaces. Additionally, these developments speak to the importance of recognition, as Lyon defines it, among interlocutors in our classrooms and in decisions about educational policies. For instance, the CCSS, with their advocacy of “critical thinking” and “cogent reasoning skills,” seem to support intellectual struggle, deliberation, even democratic practices, as a goal. But that goal will somehow be measured by large-scale tests, rather than by educators who recognize the student behind the test and who are not being recognized themselves. Perhaps Lyon’s text can inspire teachers to find ways to seize recognition, and as a result agency, in the coming implementation of assessment of the CCSS.

This review relies on the assumption that readers of College English believe in democratic practice and the possibility that education can play a role in supporting and cultivating those practices. These three books are a good reminder that education does not have to be focused on competition and achievement, about defining intelligence through academic aptitude, a reminder well served as the Common Core and its impending assessment shape the nature of public education and its goals. Each of these books in its own way also demonstrates that education is not a panacea in direct terms, but shows that as educators, particularly teachers of writing, rhetoric, and communication, we can look at how our classrooms, our curricula, and our departments can provide examples of democratic practice by modeling deliberation. Rather than viewing these texts as pedagogical guides, I see them as being aspirational and providing guidance to animate my own practices in the classroom and my efforts to influence the policies that shape them.

Works Cited


