Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts

Susan Groenke, editor

In this issue, we take a look at what English and literacy leaders have to say about the Common Core State Standards for English/Language Arts. The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The standards were designed to “define the knowledge and skills students should have to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing, academic college courses and in workforce training programs.” While defenders of the standards claim they are rigorous, encourage high-order thinking skills, and build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards (www.corestandards.org), some critics claim they are outdated and reductive. Still others worry about what it means to have a national curriculum imposed by the federal government, and some are critical of the Common Core assessments themselves, as they currently look a lot like standardized, multiple-choice tests. At the date of this writing, however, 45 states have adopted the standards, and teachers and school administrators are working diligently to understand and unpack the standards and align them accordingly.

There is definitely dissent about the standards, but as this issue of ELQ suggests, good things can come from the kinds of teacher collaboration and reflection that result from close examination of content standards and curriculum. As Jonathan Budd attests, there’s “power” in unpacking the standards and reflecting on what they ask (and don’t ask) students to know and do. Similarly, Kelly Sassi describes the unplanned-for opportunities that arose when she worked with teachers to align Common Core writing standards with state standards. And Ann Cronin explains how she has “come to terms” with the standards without sacrificing best practices in reading instruction.

Also, I’m delighted to feature longtime English teacher and CEL member Tom Scott in our CEL Member Profile. Tom’s a true leader in our field, and we’re lucky to have his perspective and voice (and words of caution) on the Common Core Standards in this issue. Finally, we end with Ernest Morrell’s keynote speech on English leadership from last year’s CEL Convention in Orlando, Florida. Ernest, a teacher educator and longtime advocate for urban youth and powerful literacy pedagogies, encourages us to imagine new visions of English leadership in the age of Common Core Standards.
The Common Core Standards: Using the Power Wisely
Jonathan S. Budl, English Teacher and Director of the Writing Center
Joel Barlow High School, Easton-Redding, Connecticut

Difficult as it may be to find educators enamored of curricular structures developed by others and transmitted from above, my experience this past year becoming acquainted with the Common Core Standards in English/Language Arts has moved me to the belief that the Standards do indeed have power behind them. It is a power that can be harnessed for good—if educators are willing to do the hard work of unpacking the Standards; questioning the Standards, themselves, and reflecting on their own practice; and staying focused on what is good for students.

First, it is impossible to argue against the idea that all students should be held to high and rigorous standards in English language arts. However, in my experience, rigorous curriculum still tends to occur for only the most able students. For example, early in my career, I taught in a district in which the eleventh-grade curriculum was organized around key topics related to individual identity and an understanding of others. Teachers had flexibility in utilizing varied texts of world literature to investigate topics such as gender, war and conflict, and the like. This course design was an effective means of organizing and promoting student learning outcomes. Better still, it had been developed over time by a team of teachers utilizing the then-current research base, so teachers were invested in the process and had the opportunity to have their perspectives expanded by the views of their colleagues. Yet, only those students in advanced classes experienced this curriculum. In contrast, students in lower-tracked courses experienced less thoughtfulness and more teacher-dependent curricula that didn’t foster creativity or inspire motivation and engagement.

If we want our students to be the beneficiaries of a well-designed curriculum responsive to a changing world, then we should be open to the rich conversations that can be enabled when groups of teachers come together to plan and design common learning goals and outcomes for students. I would begin such conversations by emphasizing that the Common Core Standards give collaborative teams of teachers the best chance at a positive reception and implementation, especially if those teams are encouraged to use them as a basis for their own local decisions about curriculum in their own districts.

States and local districts are obviously handling the Common Core Standards slightly differently, and the current approach in my own state appears to be thoughtful and instructive. A committee of approximately 25 English language arts educators, K–12, have been working with state department representatives and an external curriculum consultant to unpack the Common Core Standards in English language arts and develop a model that local districts can choose to use in designing their own curricula. Obviously the assessments, still in their design stage, will impose some natural limitations on districts, but it has been a conscious—and wise—decision for our state committee to develop a model of possibility, as opposed to a model of prescription. A legitimate concern with a model of prescription is that it will decrease local teacher engagement at the very time when we need every educator to be most engaged.

Having worked with the Common Core State Standards, particularly...
9–12, at some degree of specificity, then, I wish to focus on two particular threads of conversation to demonstrate the richness of possibility for all of us, if the Standards are used not to impede, but to enable individual teachers and teams of teachers.

The Structure of the Common Core Standards

The first thread of conversation involves the very structure of the Common Core Standards for English/Language Arts, which is framed around categories of Reading (subdivided into Literature and Informational Text), Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language. When one moves to unpack the Standards themselves, therefore, one must confront each category and consider its importance, relatively as well as objectively, in one’s own curriculum.

It is true that the language arts themselves are integrated, even in the most disciplinary approaches: we read texts that were written by others; we write after we’ve heard others speak about their ideas; and so on. So at first glance, the division of English language arts into the four components I outlined previously seems counterintuitive. Yet no one—not the authors of the Standards themselves, nor, certainly, the individuals on our state committee—has ever operated with the belief that the four categories within English language arts should be taught in isolation from one another. Indeed, a conscious emphasis on our part has been for reading, writing, speaking, and listening to be woven together to the greatest possible extent, and that has informed our work from the very first day. But what the four categories do enable is a focus on those four categories, a focus from which, otherwise, our well-intentioned efforts at curriculum for English language arts might stray.

Consider Speaking and Listening. In principle, I have found that almost all English educators validate the importance of these skills to their students. Yet, in practice, I have found that these skills often recede, surrendering precedence to reading and writing. And while it is true that a focus on reading and writing almost certainly includes some focus on speaking and listening, that obscures the fact that our students can benefit from more of our conscious attention to speaking and listening.

The Common Core Standards at the 9–12 level, for example, intelligently articulate four different aspects of what it means to “initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions.” We as teachers know intuitively that we want all students to participate in student-led discussions, but we tend to be stymied when some do not. And for those who do, we tend not to assess in any explicit way their degree or quality of performance. Yet we know that, in the twenty-first century, our students will need to work in groups, to present their creative results, to interact with those quite different from themselves. Our world looks different now from what it looked like 50 years ago, and that should be reflected in a more conscious focus on a primary way—the most ancient way—in which we communicate with others: through speaking and listening.

I would suggest, then, that the Speaking and Listening category of the Standards, if handled well by states and local districts, can encourage us, usefully, to reexamine our approach to those core language arts competencies, to consider re-balancing their role in our curriculum, to even idealize what might be an effective assessment of speaking and listening at various grade levels or in various circumstances. Assessing a student’s speaking and listening skills is difficult, even on the individual classroom level; that difficulty is magnified when we consider groups of students together, especially in any organized sense. We may often find it easier to construct certain reading and writing assessments, yet surely we should not neglect the critical importance of assessing the extremely necessary, though difficult, competencies in speaking and listening.

What Kinds of Writing Have Value?

The second thread of our ongoing committee conversations about the Standards has also revealed concerns, many of which I believe can be properly handled on the local level. There is one in particular, however, that I believe could have a deleterious impact on the state of English education if we do not consciously challenge it.

The Standards divide the Writing category into three genres: argumentative, informative/explanatory, and narrative. In the later grades, as compared to the earlier grades, there is an explicit focus on argumentative and informative/explanatory writing over narrative writing. Indeed, the authors of the Standards have justified this emphasis by citing the demands on students after they leave high school. They state, for example, that “students’ ability to write sound arguments on substantive topics and issues . . . is critical to college and career readiness.” And, in fact, the Samples of Student Writing (Appendix C of the Standards) for the 9–12 level totally ignore narrative writing.

No one will dispute the value of argument, particularly to the post-high-school context, but we must consciously reject, K–12, both the explicit and the implicit privileging of argumentative and informative/explanatory writing. In our class-
rooms, I suspect we all see the power of narrative writing, particularly as our students, in their adolescence, are coming to better understand themselves and others. Langer (2011) has written recently of the importance of “envisionments” in the student’s experience with literature, and, as many members of our state committee have further observed, it is often by attempting to write like an author such as Shakespeare or Morrison or Hosseini that one comes to better appreciate the author’s craft.

As we know, of course, many current assessments are narrowly focused on argumentative and informative/explanatory writing, sometimes even on just one of those. Our voices, not just at the state and national levels, but also at local levels, should balance the voices of the test-makers, and should utilize informed and reasoned evidence to justify why narrative writing demands our attention in a legitimate scope and sequence from kindergarten all the way through grade 12.

One Last Thought

It is worth noting, finally, that our own collective future as producers of texts depends on our students’ ability to become authors themselves. While it is the case that not all will be published authors whose books grace the shelves of the local library, all our students in fact possess latent creativity. And those with talent that has been nurtured and cultivated in the classroom will be tomorrow’s Shakespeares and Morrisses and Hosseinis. We would be doing ourselves a collective disservice to never empower those developing authors’ voices with legitimacy and integrity.

The Common Core Standards do have power. They have the power, in the hands of the dedicated and educated professionals in each school district and each state, to help us reconsider and reconceptualize how we can better structure our students’ learning. Unfortunately, they also have the power, if used too narrowly, to limit our and our students’ possibilities. Rather than reject the Standards whole-cloth, we should embrace their possibility and be advocates for the best and most comprehensive K–12 English language arts education for our students. ●

Reference


Misgivings and Opportunities: The Common Core Writing Standards

Kelly Sassi, North Dakota State University, Fargo

“We just worked hard to align our curriculum to state standards. Why are we doing this again?”

“Our state hasn’t adopted Common Core standards yet. Why do all this alignment work now?”

“How can we deal with these new standards if we don’t have professional development to go along with it?”

These are just a few of the concerns voiced by a group of teachers from grades 6–12 with whom I have worked over the past academic year to rewrite district English Language Arts curriculum to align with the Common Core Standards in English (specifically the writing standards). Despite what I call “standards fatigue,” and concerns about their hard work ending up in a forgotten binder on a shelf, many saw it as an opportunity to promote consistency of instruction across grades and increase student success in a district where only 66.3% of sixth graders read at grade level.

While I continue to have concerns about the Common Core Standards, and share those in this article, I saw many positive opportunities arise from our work together. These include: 1) time to read current research and incorporate its principles into our work; 2) collaboration between high school teachers and college writing instructors; and 3) group focus on comparing our state standards with the Common Core Standards to identify strengths and weaknesses in both. I describe each of these in more detail below, but first, I will share my misgivings about the Common Core English Standards.

Misgivings

I had misgivings when the district curriculum coordinator asked me to work with teachers as a consultant. As an English education professor new to North Dakota, I was eager to
foster relationships with local schools, but I knew that there were problems with the Common Core Standards. The National Council of Teachers of English was not involved in the creation of the Common Core Standards, nor had the organization endorsed them. Early drafts showed a lack of attention to the process of writing, but I had additional concerns with the writing standards.

The Common Core Standards focus on three modes of writing: informative, argumentative, and narrative, which hearkens back to Alexander Bain’s four modes of writing in the 19th century: exposition, description, narration, and argument. Contemporary compositionists find these modes outdated, in that real-world writing rarely falls into just one of these categories. More likely, multiple modes are used.

When we consider these modes in the context of “college and career readiness,” they seem even less useful. First-year college writers are more likely to have to make their own choices about the rhetorical strategies that will be most effective for a particular audience in a particular context. And when was the last time your employer asked you to write a narrative essay? In other words, the kind of academic writing outlined in detail in the Common Core Standards is not only irrelevant for the work world, but also fails to address the broad and diverse range of skills needed for first-year college writing.

With these concerns, then, how could I ethically assist a district in adopting these standards? Despite my misgivings, I met with the curriculum coordinator and the assistant superintendent. It turned out that we shared a common philosophy about the teaching of English, and they were wholeheartedly supportive of the NCTE standards, to the point that they were willing to supplement the Common Core Standards with NCTE standards in their district curriculum. I agreed to work with them, and thus began an academic year of growth and challenge, both for me and for our core group of 11 teachers.

Our Work Begins

The district provided substitute teachers for a half-day a month for the duration of the school year so that teachers could meet together. Participating teachers represented each school in the district, every grade, and diversity in age, gender, and experience. What the teachers shared in common was an engagement with the profession and a desire to improve their curriculum.

We scheduled our work so teachers could slowly learn about each strand of the Common Core Standards, share the strand with their colleagues at their respective schools, and bring feedback to the group. In planning the work, I relied on suggestions from a new book, *Taking Initiative on Writing* (Gere, Dickinson, McBee Orzulak, & Moody, 2010); I modified the chart in the book to include reading, speaking, and listening (see Fig. 1).

Together, we agreed that the goal of the committee would be to create a district curriculum that would be inclusive, read as more “teacher-friendly,” make sense vertically (eliminating gaps and overlaps between grade levels), be based on new Common Core Standards in English and NCTE standards, and include at least one final assessment for each course (and, ideally, a set of suggested common assessments).

Time to Read

Among the many positive opportunities that arose from our collaborative work together was time to read and discuss professional literature. The pacing for learning the new standards was intentionally slow, allowing me time to include readings to supplement our work. I felt strongly that any discussion of the standards should be contextualized in discussions about what teachers already do well and what the research in our field deems “best practice.”

As a result, we did a book study of Herrington, Hodgson, and Moran’s (2009) book, *Teaching the New Writing: Technology, Change, and Assess-
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<td>ELA Curriculum will be written and placed on district’s intranet</td>
<td>9/23 Team of 11 teachers selected and brought together</td>
<td>10/28 committee members share feedback from teachers in their building on the Common Core (CC) Standards in Writing</td>
<td>12/2 Each committee member shares feedback from teachers in their building on the Common Core Standards in Reading</td>
<td>1/25 Each committee member shares feedback from teachers in their building on the Common Core Standards in Speaking and Listening</td>
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<td>A. Recruit and support stakeholders.</td>
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<td>B. Survey ELA Instruction in your school.</td>
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<td>C. Develop District-wide grade level standards &amp; common assessments</td>
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<td>1/25 WRITING</td>
<td>2/22 READING</td>
<td>3/29 SPEAKING</td>
<td>4/19 LISTENING</td>
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| II. Implement Action Steps | | | | | | | | | |
| A. Approve grade-level goals | WRITING | READING | SPEAKING | 5/17 LISTENING |
| B. Approve grade-level common assessments | WRITING | READING | SPEAKING | LISTENING |
| C. Provide professional development | | | | FALL 2011 |

**Figure 1.** English Language Arts Curriculum Initiative Timeline

Seeing this framework for success gave teachers permission to hold onto those parts of their teaching practice that might otherwise be jettisoned in the push to adopt Common Core Standards.

To further strengthen the bridge between high school and college, I invited our Writing Program Administrator (WPA) to join us on the day we discussed the framework. Her expectations for first-year writers echoed what the framework identifies as the habits of mind necessary for college success. The public school teachers were so interested in how assessment works at the college level that several of them accepted our invitation to join university English instructors for the end-of-semester portfolio assessment of first-year writing, an experience they valued highly. We made plans to reciprocate when the district pilots their common assessment.

Exploring the requirements at the college level led to consideration of the needs of businesses as well. In Fargo, we are fortunate to have the second largest Microsoft campus outside of Washington State, and the company recently hosted a summit on how higher education could change its general education requirements to better meet the needs of businesses. Writing and communication were the skills most frequently mentioned by these business leaders. They wanted employees who could think creatively, problem solve, and write independently for a variety of situations. As they described the kind of employee they wanted, the qualities sounded more like the habits of mind described in the Postsecondary Framework than the Common Core Standards.
Comparing State Standards with Common Core Standards

Another opportunity that arose from our collaborative work was the chance to compare our current state standards with the Common Core Standards. I had heard from other NWP teachers that they had found the North Dakota standards in writing much less rigorous in comparison to the Common Core Standards, so we looked more carefully at the difference between the two. On a global level, the North Dakota standards are organized differently from the Common Core Standards (see Fig. 2). There is a separate North Dakota standard for each of the four areas of the Common Core Standards, and in addition, North Dakota has separate standards for the research process and media. These areas are incorporated into the Common Core Standards in writing. Figure 3 shows what we find when we look more deeply at the writing standards for sixth grade.

In analyzing these standards side by side, we found that North Dakota state standards are more detailed in the writing process and media. However, the Common Core Standards are much more detailed in the specific modes of writing. Perhaps this is why some teachers feel that the Common Core Standards are more rigorous in writing than our state standards.

For the specific district I’m working with, the common assessment is a well-developed paragraph, and all sixth-grade teachers focus on this. The descriptions for the types of writing in the Common Core clearly imply multi-paragraph pieces of writing. For example, North Dakota requires a persuasive piece of writing that could come in the form of an opinion of an unspecified length. The Common Core Standards require a fully developed argument that requires students to “introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly; support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text; use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationships among claim(s) and reasons; . . . and provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument presented.” When teachers looked carefully at this Common Core Standard, some concluded that professional development would be necessary for them to teach these argumentative skills effectively.

Where Does This Leave Us? Are We Aligned Yet?

No, we are not aligned yet, but we do have greater insights about how to work with the Common Core Standards and what to ask for in professional development. We now know that our work—especially in aligning writing standards—needs to be pursued within a broader context that includes postsecondary expectations and real-life writing demands. We know that districts should adopt common assessments—such as portfolios and authentic writing—that go beyond what is easily measured on a standardized test, and should support teachers’ efforts to cultivate habits of mind that will contribute to success in college and on the job. We also know strengths exist in our current standards, such as North Dakota’s attention to media, and these should not be ignored.

Teachers need time and a process for engaging with standards in a way that is empowering to them. And for a teacher educator like me, the experience has been invaluable. I have made many changes to my methods courses based on what I’ve learned through my work and conversations with teachers. Teachers also need professional development for successful implementation of the skills that current state standards do not emphasize.

Furthermore, we need to closely examine the results of the changes that occur as the Common Core Standards are adopted. English leaders should research not just changes in test scores, but changes in classroom practices, changes in college success, and changes in career readiness. We need to have evidence of and a language for describing the teaching and learning that we value.

References


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<tr>
<th>6TH-GRADE COMMON CORE STANDARDS in Writing</th>
<th>NORTH DAKOTA STANDARDS in Writing</th>
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<tr>
<td>6.W.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.</td>
<td>6.3.3 Produce persuasive writing; e.g., opinion, essay, business letter</td>
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<tr>
<td>a. Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.</td>
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<td>b. Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.</td>
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<td>c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationships among claim(s) and reasons.</td>
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<td>d. Establish and maintain a formal style.</td>
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<td>e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument presented.</td>
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<td>6.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.</td>
<td>6.3.1 Produce informative writing; e.g., research-based report, instructions</td>
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<td>a. Introduce a topic; organize ideas, concepts, and information, using strategies such as definition, classification, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aid comprehension.</td>
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<td>b. Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.</td>
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<td>c. Use appropriate transitions to clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts.</td>
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<td>d. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.</td>
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<td>e. Establish and maintain a formal style.</td>
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<td>f. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the information or explanation presented.</td>
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<td>6.W.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.</td>
<td>6.3.2 Produce narrative writing; e.g., short story, descriptive play, poetry</td>
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<td>a. Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.</td>
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<td>b. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.</td>
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<td>c. Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another.</td>
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<td>d. Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.</td>
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<td>e. Provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events.</td>
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<td>Production and Distribution of Writing</td>
<td>6.3.5 Use strategies to write for different audiences and purposes</td>
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<td>6.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3.)</td>
<td>6.3.4 Use prewriting strategies; e.g., brainstorming, graphic organizers, outlining</td>
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<td>6.W.5 With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1–3 up to and including grade 6.)</td>
<td>6.3.6 Use prewriting strategies to create drafts</td>
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<td>6.3.8 Use criteria to evaluate own and others' writing; e.g., stay on topic, organization, effective details, clarity of message, word choice, sentence fluency</td>
<td>6.3.9 Use feedback and multiple drafts to clarify language and intent</td>
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<td>6.3.10 Edit for grammar, mechanics, usage, spelling</td>
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**Figure 3.** A comparison of the writing standards for the Common Core Standards and the state of North Dakota Standards.
| 6.W.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of three pages in a single sitting. | 6.3.11 Incorporate visual aids into written work  
6.5.1 Identify existing and developing media  
6.5.2 Use technology according to the district's appropriate use policy  
6.5.3 Construct media messages; e.g., slide shows, brochures, newsletters, commercials, advertisements  
6.5.4 Identify the point of view of a media message  
6.5.5 Identify bias in media messages  
6.5.6 Define plagiarism and its consequences |
|---|---|
| **Research to Build and Present Knowledge**  
6.W.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate. | 6.1.1 Pose relevant research questions  
6.1.2 Use sources that are appropriate for the research purpose  
6.1.3 Differentiate between accurate and inaccurate information  
6.1.4 Use information from several sources  
6.1.5 Write a research report  
6.1.6 Assess research process  
6.1.7 Evaluate a research product using a rubric |
| 6.W.8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources. | 6.3.7 Incorporate grade-level appropriate vocabulary in writing |
| 6.W.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.  
a. Apply grade 6 Reading standards to literature (e.g., “Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres [e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories] in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics.”).  
b. Apply grade 6 Reading standards to literary nonfiction (e.g., “Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not.”). |  |
| **Range of Writing**  
6.W.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences. |  |


### 2012 Call for CEL Award for Exemplary Leadership

This award is given annually to an NCTE member who is an outstanding English language arts educator and leader. Please nominate an exceptional leader who has had an impact on the profession through one or more of the following: (1) work that has focused on exceptional teaching and/or leadership practices (e.g., building an effective department, grade level, or building team; developing curricula or processes for practicing English language arts educators; or mentoring); (2) contributions to the profession through involvement at both the local and national levels; (3) publications that have had a major impact.

Your award nominee submission must include a nomination letter, the nominee’s curriculum vitae, and no more than three additional letters of support from various colleagues. Send by **February 1, 2012**, to: Wanda Porter, 47 Puukani Place, Kailua, HI 96734; or email wandrport@hawaiiantel.net (subject: CEL Exemplary Leader).
CEL Member Profile: Tom Scott
A Larger Vision: Establishing a Context for the Common Core Standards

First, a little background for my remarks about the Common Core Standards: About three years ago, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction contacted me, asking if I would serve on a team of English educators to write a new version of our State Standards, which were then ten years old. I agreed to do so, and thus began a project that brought me to Madison for a couple of days every month over the course of the next two years. Our team's charge was to create the new Standards through the lenses of both Achieve's American Diploma Project ("for rigor," as the Department put it) and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills ("for relevance").

After a lot of discussion among ourselves and some debate, our team made some key decisions: (1) we would organize the standards into two major strands—the receptive use of language and the expressive use of language; (2) we would define the word "text" in a very broad way, meaning not only traditional print, but also visual, multimodal, and performance texts; (3) we would establish K–2, 3–5, 6–8, 9–12 grade bands; and (4) we would emphasize not only skills, but also the humanities aspects of our discipline. My role was to coordinate the work of the grade band writing teams to see that transitions were smooth and that there was increasing complexity as we moved up through the bands.

This work went on until late winter of 2010. We were nearing completion and talking about how we would “roll out” the Standards across the state when it rather suddenly became clear that the state was going to scuttle our work and adopt the Common Core Standards instead, which it did in June of 2010. I would not be honest if I didn’t admit that we felt betrayed if I didn’t admit that we felt betrayed and disappointed, particularly when we saw the Common Core Standards in draft form. They seemed “old hat” to us, whereas ours seemed progressive, forward-looking, and embedded in a humanistic vision of the English language arts.

As I’m guessing is true for many readers of this journal, I have reservations about the Common Core Standards themselves and concerns about how they will impact instruction and assessment in our classrooms. For one thing, establishing individual grade Standards in K–8 ignores the reality that there might be as much as a year difference in the ages of the children in any one of those grades; it also flies in the face of what we know to be true about the natural ranges in the development of language capacity in children. For another thing, supplying exemplar texts to illustrate text complexity comes awfully close to encouraging the adoption of those texts, and I suspect many teachers will see it that way and feel compelled to do so.

I also worry about the common assessments that are being developed in relation to the Standards by the two consortiums that are doing so, and how these large-scale tests are going to be used to judge students, teachers, and schools. But my greatest reservation about these Standards is not so much about what is there as about what is not. I see very little communicated in them that makes clear that the discipline of English is one of the humanities. The focus is almost exclusively on the development of skills with hardly anything said about the value of reading, writing, discussing, and other creative endeavors as means by which we explore and seek to understand human experience—our own and that of others.

In over 40 years of working in this profession, I have never met a teacher who has not wanted students to be skilled in the use of language and the interpretation of texts. But most of us see skills as a means to an end and not as an end in themselves. The value in story, poetry, drama, film, and essay—in reading and producing these texts—lies not in the demonstration of skills, but in the delving into the complexity of what it means to be a human being living in a certain time in history and in a certain place and culture. These genres can touch our souls as we engage aesthetically with them and use them to interrogate our own understanding of our lives. This vision of the language arts seems absent from the Standards.

Pragmatically, we must accept the fact that the Standards are now a reality of our professional lives and find ways in which to integrate them into the work that we do. But even as we do so, I think it is imperative that we who are concerned with leadership issues or occupy leadership positions see the skills the Standards address as only a part of our discipline and that we place these skills in a much
A s a curriculum consultant working with teachers and administrators to create the English program for 9th and 10th grades in the large, urban school district of Hartford, Connecticut, I must admit I was dismayed with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) at first. They seemed incongruous with our beliefs that curriculum should encourage students to construct their own knowledge as they become thoughtful readers and deep thinkers. I felt that the Standards—especially the “reading literature” Standards—hearkened back to the kind of teaching I had left behind many years ago.

Ultimately, however, the teachers and I found a way to work with the Standards without compromising what we know to be “best reading practices” in teaching high school English. I hope that by sharing this story of my journey with the Standards, I can help other curriculum designers who may be struggling philosophically and/or practically with their adoption and alignment.

The Journey Begins . . .

The 9th- and 10th-grade English teachers and I were already having conversations about the problem of students doing too little reading and the particular challenges of creating a culture of reading in our urban school district. As a committee, we spent time considering how 9th- and 10th-grade students learn and what pedagogy would best encourage their achievement. We also thought about how we could best teach the skills students will need for the knowledge-based global economy in which they will work.

After reading several reports, most notably The Global Achievement Gap by Tony Wagner, we concluded that these skills include: (1) critical thinking with an emphasis on questioning; (2) collaboration with others in order to explore divergent thinking; (3) creativity based on imagination and initiative; and (4) a disciplined stamina or persistence. From all of this thinking, we summed up our goals for 9th- and 10th-grade English in one sentence: Students will BE readers.

We wanted students to not merely learn about texts, but to interact and engage with texts, creating individual and collaborative meanings and drawing from the text in discussions.

Analyzing the Reading Standards

It is through the lens of this curriculum work that I analyzed the 42 Common Core English Language Arts Standards. I was concerned that the CCSS would take us in another direction and would impede our goals, so I was determined to become familiar with them to see if my fears could be allayed. Unfortunately, they were not. My greatest fear surrounded the ten Common Core Standards for Reading Literature, which include:

- summarize the information in the text;
- determine a theme and give details over the course of the text;
- analyze how characters develop a theme or advance the plot;
- identify how language sets a tone;
- analyze point of view in a text from outside the United States;
- determine a theme and give details over the course of the text;
- analyze how characters develop a theme or advance the plot;
- identify how language sets a tone;
- analyze point of view in a text from outside the United States;

We wanted to not merely learn about texts, but to interact and engage with texts, creating individual and collaborative meanings and drawing from the text in discussions. Ultimately, we envisioned our students participating in classroom communities in which they would articulate their own questions and ideas and respond to the ideas and questions of others, consider multiple perspectives, and develop individual and collaborative interpretations through close readings of texts.
• consider how a subject is represented in two different artistic mediums; and
• identify source materials that the author draws on and transforms (e.g., Biblical literature, classical mythology).

The emphasis in these clinical, objective Standards seems to be solely on gaining information from texts, not on reading to learn more about oneself, others, and the human condition. Imagine my concern when I read the ten Standards for Reading Informational Texts and found them to be a mirror image of the Reading Literature Standards. According to both Standards, reading a front-page news story, an inaugural address, and a poem are the same intellectual processes.

I believe that reading literature is about experiencing the text, reflecting upon the ideas it offers, and creating individual meaning from that experience (Blau, 2003, pp. 144–146). We don’t read Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman (1949/1996) solely to gain information about the time period, the names of the characters, or exactly how Ben got rich, but rather to wonder about whether the American Dream causes more sorrow than joy, whether it enriches our quality of life or erodes what might be the essence of a good life. The English class is usually the only class in which students are encouraged to grow as interpreters, as questioners, and as divergent and innovative thinkers.

Engaging Readers as Thinkers

Reading literature solely to extract information and to apply in-the-head cognitive, analytical skills did not fit our goals for our curriculum project in which students would be readers of literature. Instead, we envisioned the kind of student engagement and achievement witnessed in a ninth-grade class in Hartford, where students were reading Melba Patillo Beal’s (2007) Warriors Don’t Cry.

On the day I visited, the teacher asked students to meet in small groups and to select the best of their small-group discussion questions to share in whole-class discussion. The teacher did not define what she meant by “best.” As I traveled from group to group, I noticed that the process of choosing the “best” question was similar, although each group had different questions. I asked a student how her group was deciding which question was the “best.” She responded, “Because [the question] has the most possibilities.” The students seemed to know that the authentic, engaged experience of reading literature involves thinking as deeply and diversely as possible in order to create individual meanings. None of the students thought that a good question was about finding one right answer, or about looking for in-the-text, factual information.

As I continued to listen to their conversations, I heard them engaging in deep thinking by: extensively referencing the text as they discussed their differing opinions about characters and themes; asking questions about topics in the book, such as bullying and racism; making connections between the ideas in the text and contemporary society; and examining the genre by asking why anyone would write a 300-page story of his or her life. (I was fascinated by that question in particular. One student said the purpose of memoir was to capture a moment in history; another said it was to teach a lesson; and another said that he thought memoir writing was “really rather self-absorbed”?). They also analyzed whether their questions helped them comprehend the plot, interpret the characters, or evaluate ideas the text offered.

Both in their small-group conversations and in the subsequent whole-class discussion, students were enthusiastically engaged in asking and responding to complex and penetrating questions about their reading. They were working with the “stuff” of literature (theme, character, word choice, etc.) as they were learning how to be readers, and learning how to experience literature as a way to become critical and inquiring thinkers.

When I talked with the teacher at the end of the school year, she told me that she could honestly say that all of her students—from the most struggling of readers to the most proficient—became better readers through this kind of questioning, and that they approached reading a new text with more enthusiasm and skillful dispositions (e.g., referencing the text in discussion) than ever before.

“Hard-Core Standards”

Following on the heels of this class observation, the director of secondary literacy in Hartford recommended to the committee a video presentation by David Coleman, the lead author and architect of the English Language Arts portion of the CCSS as he addressed a Teach for America conference (http://www.vimeo.com/19929207). I couldn’t wait to watch it. I thought maybe it would offer some insight on how best to balance our goals for reading instruction with the Common Core Reading Standards.

In the presentation, David Coleman emphatically declared that “the secret” about the Common Core State Standards is that there are prioritized Standards, which he referred to as “hard-core standards.” He said that there were two such hard-core standards: (1) that students read increasingly complex texts with confidence, and (2) that students write clearly and (2) that students write clearly. He explained that the one skill that students need to meet both hard-core standards is to cite evidence as they read and write. Coleman “dared” the audience to implement only those two Standards, because they “are demonstrably and overwhelmingly responsible for college readiness.”

Coleman went on to advocate that students learn to “read like a detective” because “reading is a form of inquiry.” He said that we should not design discrete lessons in literary conventions but rather engage students in substantive inquiry about what they are reading so that literary conventions become part of the ongoing conversation. He poked fun at
English teachers teaching specific lessons about predictions or inferences, and said that all research shows that recognizing particular literary conventions does not develop readers. He said that there never has been a student who “is excellent at main idea and poor at character.” Over and over and over again, he reiterated that the one and only skill that matters is to “interrogate” texts by citing evidence.

Ironically, Coleman seemed at odds with the very Standards that he wrote, but I think that he is urging English teachers to recognize the subtext in the Standards language, and to design curriculum and conduct professional development with that recognition in mind. Fortunately for us, that subtext to “cite evidence” was totally consistent with our own-sentence curriculum goal of students being engaged with texts as they read and think about literature.

**Drawing from the Speaking/Listening Standards to Inform Reading Instruction**

As we considered Coleman’s words, we realized that a Speaking and Listening Common Core Standard actually seemed more foundational to our beliefs about reading instruction than any of the Reading Standards. The first Standard (SL1) in the Speaking and Listening Standards is the only one among the 42 Standards that asks students to question the text, to be “interrogators” of the text, and to not treat literature as information. It speaks about using collaboration as the means by which students deepen and broaden their thinking about texts. It specifies that students learn to dialogue with others about their interpretations of texts, to not settle for easy answers, to persist in their thinking, and to value their own questions. By drawing on this Standard as we plan and implement reading instruction, we can teach students how to engage with texts and truly be readers and thinkers.

**Recommendations for Curriculum Design**

Based on the knowledge that I have gained about the Common Core State Standards, I offer the following recommendations for curriculum design and professional development for implementing the Reading Standards:

1. Identify the Standards about students reading proficiently and independently (RL10) and citing texts to support analysis (RL1) as the key literature Standards and consider the other literature Standards to be supplementary.

2. Teach students to be interrogators of texts as they respond to literature. Organize units of instruction to teach skills for engaging with texts (e.g., posing questions, engaging in discussion) and citing text evidence in discussion and writing about texts.

3. Make collaboration (SL1) pivotal to each unit of the curriculum and assess students on their achievement as collaborators.

4. Teach students to read literature as literature. Distinguish clearly between how students are asked to read literature and how they are asked to read informational texts.

5. Encourage students to use their own increasingly strong and confident voices as they read. Design learning experiences that require it.

**References**


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**Kylene Beers—2011 CEL Exemplary Leader Award Recipient**

Kylene Beers is the Senior Reading Advisor to Secondary Schools for the Reading and Writing Project at Teachers College, Columbia University. Through her books, workshops, summer institute presentations, consultations, and numerous publications, she has influenced an incredible number of teachers of reading. She has helped teachers of other disciplines understand that they, too, must help students learn to read if they are to succeed in their subject. Dr. Beers’s book *When Kids Can’t Read, What Teachers Can Do: A Guide for Teachers 6–12* is the capstone of contributions she has made through her writing. She has been the senior author or contributing author for numerous national textbooks for public schools, including *Elements of Literature, Grades 6–12*. She was coeditor of *Adolescent Literacy: Turning Promise into Practice / A Handbook for Teachers, Principals, and Policy Makers*, a book that serves as the guide for teacher learning communities. Beers was two-term chair of the National Adolescent Literacy Coalition, a coalition of over 60 national organizations working together to solve issues of adolescent literacy. She has served NCTE in varied capacities, including as editor of *Voices from the Middle* for seven years and as President of NCTE 2008–2009. Dr. Beers has served the Council, the profession, and students of all ages with energy, commitment, and distinction throughout her career.
Powerful Leadership for English Education

Ernest Morrell, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York

This article has been prepared for print from the keynote speech delivered at the 2010 CEL Conference in Orlando, Florida.

According to the Paris-based Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the United States scored 17th overall and 14th among 34 member nations in 2009 on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) examination of reading achievement, which measures literacy performance among a national sample of 15-year-olds (Fleischman, Hopstock, Pelczar, and Shelley, 2010). This news comes on the heels of an earlier report that showed US students ranking 11th among this same group of nations with respect to college completion rates for 25–34-year-olds (College Board, 2008). These numbers are startling in a nation that has prided itself on being the leader of the world in education, enterprise, and the promotion of democracy. The data are also troubling when we consider the importance of education, and especially literacy education, to the social, political, and economic destinies of our youth in an era of knowledge economies—an era where a postsecondary education serves as a passport to a productive, participatory, and remunerative future.

The statistics become even more troubling for me, however, when we pay closer attention to the concentration of inequality in literacy achievement within our nation’s poor and historically marginalized populations. In 2008, the College Board released a report entitled “Coming to Our Senses: Education and America’s Future,” in which the authors discuss generally the United States’ educational decline. The report also discusses the disproportionately low percentage of American students of color receiving college degrees. In order to fuel the economy of the 21st century, we will need to double the number of Americans receiving postsecondary degrees, and most of this gain needs to come from populations who have not historically had high levels of reading achievement or college access. The president’s education team corroborates this diagnosis in their recently released Blueprint for Educational Reform (USDOE, 2010), which calls for a doubling of the number of college degrees by 2020.

As English educators, we must find ourselves troubled by these trends and what they portend for the American future. As guardians of a public sphere that prides itself on equity and access, we must be even more troubled by the inequitable distribution of educational achievement within our own nation. Many of us have dedicated our lives to literacy education because we know that a student’s ability to read and write powerfully often serves as a key to unlock the doors to their professional and civic futures. As a field, it follows then that we must also understand our potential to transform literacy education in ways that allow us to resume our international competitiveness and preserve our vibrant democracy while we also remedy the inequities that persist in our own schools.

To accomplish these ambitious goals, we must dispense with business as usual and exert extraordinary leadership in these most extraordinary times. What does all of this mean for English education? How do we exert leadership in this moment? How can we offer guidance that can increase equity and access while we also temper the desire to frame the future of education in entirely economic terms? The goal of this article is to offer a framework for leadership in English education that enables us to confront these challenges and that strengthens the discipline as we enter our second century of service to America’s youth and to the nation as a whole.

Conceptual Leadership

Conceptual leadership requires us to have the courage to redefine our discipline in ways that will maintain its vibrancy and relevance to the new millennium. I am reminded of the title of Howard Zinn’s memoir, “You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train” (Zinn, 1994). Times do change and, especially in the past 30 years, literacies also change. As communications technologies transform our world, we
must acknowledge this transformation by also transforming the content and processes of our P–16 English classrooms.

Redefining literacy is not a haphazard activity, however. We need to expand definitions of literacy to include the consumption and production of multimodal texts, but we must not allow literacy to mean anything and everything. The New Literacy Studies scholars encourage us to redefine literacies as multiple, as cultural, as socially situated, and as tied to existing power relations (Street, 1984; Barton & Hamilton, 2000). They also encourage us to position ourselves as ethnographers who constantly observe the communities we teach to understand how the members of these communities use language and literacy in everyday cultural activity (Heath, 1983; Mahiri, 2003). This does not absolve us from teaching academic literacies, it merely transitions the task from one of depositing literacy into the minds of the illiterate to one of introducing intelligent minds to new (and often empowering) literacies.

In English education, we must also be willing to redefine literature. We know from the work of Arthur Applebee (1993) and others that the literary canon changes slowly, if at all, in the educational career of students. For instance, Applebee found that from the 1960s to the 1990s, the most frequently taught books changed hardly at all. We also know that of the 10 most frequently taught books in high school, 9 are written by white males and none are written by non-white authors (Applebee, 1993). Given that our school population is half female and nearly 40 percent non-white and that all of our students need to gain a greater understanding of the diversity of the human condition, we must be relentless in our endeavor to expand the canon of great literature to include diverse voices, to include women, and to include more contemporary accounts of the human condition.

Great literature is not dead, and it is possible to introduce youth to our rich literary tradition while also teaching them that one culture doesn’t own the monopoly on great literature. We must do this as a profession and it doesn’t have to be haphazardly. We can identify criteria for selecting texts, and we can insist that all students be exposed to a more diverse selection of texts. Multiculturalism should not imply that African American students be exposed to African American writers solely. All students need to be exposed to more African American writers, and African American students also need exposure to writers of all ethnic backgrounds. It is wrong to pigeonhole groups of persons, and it is also impractical given the diverse and increasingly heterogeneous classrooms of the 21st century.

**Empirical Leadership**

Despite the incessant rhetoric to the contrary, we know that many excellent teachers in US English classrooms challenge students on a daily basis. These teachers invite students to become critical readers and writers of the word and the world. Students not only succeed in these classrooms, they also gain a love of literacy and embrace identities as intellectuals who produce and disseminate knowledge. These classrooms can be found in every city and every school district, regardless of the race or socioeconomic status of the students.

As leaders in English education, we must introduce America to these classrooms in a more intimate and systematic way. We need to become committed to amassing all that we know about effective English instruction and sharing that information with the silent majority that is secretly repulsed by the standardized-testing regime, but at present sees no better alternatives. Many teachers out there are succeeding, and if we learned from them, supported them, and let them share their talents and philosophies with others, then that success would multiply. We simply have to do a better job of amassing data on the scores of highly effective English language arts teachers who are consistently achieving results in high-poverty, high-need schools. English educators must take the lead in producing and distributing knowledge regarding quality teaching and teacher education to audiences that can shape policy and practice.

At a very basic level, this means letting people know what is happening in America’s best English classrooms and English education programs. While a term such as “best” may be subjective and open to debate, this is a debate that needs to happen, and it needs to be framed and informed by those from within the community of English educators. At present, the conversation is too often framed in terms of blanket assumptions about the quality of instruction students are receiving and, as such, the political directives are often punitive and dismissive of all that teachers do. From a practical level, these criticisms leave very little insight into what we might do on a micro-level to improve the level of instruction for all students. By contrast, focusing on exemplars of practice can help to raise the morale within and regarding the profession; we could also hang our hats on real ideas and practices that lead to results, and we can shape teacher training and professional development around these empowering practices.

Part of this empirical leadership will require an expansion of teacher action research (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1992), where primary, secondary, and tertiary English teachers conduct investigations in their own classrooms, documenting the powerful learning as well as the challenges that accompany innovative lessons and units. I have written elsewhere that the only way we will truly understand the relationship between theories of teaching and learning and actual classroom practice is to more thoroughly investigate what happens on a day-to-day basis in our most successful classrooms (Morrell, 2009). There is also a definitive role for English educators who can contribute...
to our empirical knowledge base on a variety of fronts. I have broken this role down into four strands.

First, work collaboratively with teachers employing a design-experiment methodology (Brown, 1992; Palmiscan, 2005). By design experiment, I am referring to the process where educators collaboratively design an intervention and then draw upon a variety of quantitative and qualitative measures to discern whether or not the intervention proved successful. Similar to action-research projects, design experiments can tell us a great deal about the potential success of innovative approaches to English teaching, and they often can pave the way for larger-scale interventions to follow.

Second, engage in case study and ethnographic work, unpacking the life in everyday classrooms from a phenomenological approach. English educators can conduct thick-description investigations that reveal a great deal about life in English classrooms as teachers attempt to incorporate critical approaches, new media literacies, and culturally and socially relevant pedagogies inside of increasingly diverse classrooms in an age of Common Core Standards.

Third, draw from emergent scholarship in the learning sciences to document powerful student learning in classrooms and hybrid spaces. There is an explosion of work in literacy education that allows researchers to use qualitative means to ascertain literacy learning in school and outside-of-school settings (Gutierrez, 2008; Lee, 2007). English educators can draw upon these schools of research to thoroughly document literacy learning of youth, both in classrooms and in their homes and communities. This work becomes important as we are consistently challenged to demonstrate that students are learning. The learning sciences methodologies allow for qualitative analyses of student literacy learning, and they also point to new ways to assess student learning for teachers, administrators, and policymakers. This makes it possible for English educators to affect the conversation empirically, methodologically, and logistically, through offering alternate assessment models.

Fourth, document successful practices in preservice and inservice education. English Educators can also add to the empirical knowledge base by examining approaches to teacher education that have proven successful in the short-term by changing teachers’ dispositions and over the long-term by impacting student achievement, teacher efficacy, and eliminating teacher attrition.

**Pedagogical Leadership**

Additionally, leadership in English Education must encourage powerful pedagogical practices. There is a palpable struggle between the learner-centered, participatory pedagogies that are prevalent in independent schools and classrooms that serve wealthy and high-tracked students, and the drill and kill, script-oriented pedagogies that are pedaled to the low-tracked students and students who attend schools in impoverished neighborhoods (Anyon, 1981; Oakes, 1985). If we are to increase the academic achievement and civic development for all students, then they all deserve the rich interactive classroom environments that we know work.

However, part of our struggle is to translate these ideas about teaching and learning into concrete examples within our ever-shifting discipline. While we may resonate with the ideals of a John Dewey (1903) or a Paulo Freire (1970), both of whom advocated for participatory and empowering teaching practices, we still need to provide models of how these theoretical approaches to classroom instruction can play out in variously situated English classrooms of the early 21st century, classrooms that span age-group levels and geographies, as well as socioeconomic, gendered, and ethnic lines. From an extensive analysis of these examples, we can develop grounded theories of powerful teaching in the English classroom of the 21st century that provide a counter-narrative to the current models of teaching that are becoming increasingly prevalent.

My work in English Education over the past 20 years has attempted to focus on providing powerful exemplars of practice in hopes of contributing toward these grounded theories of powerful English. A few areas of foci have included: the use of popular culture to connect to academic literacies (Morrell, 2002), apprenticing youth as researchers of their schools and communities (Morrell, 2008), working with youth as producers and distributors of new media texts, and allowing spaces for youth to tell their personal narratives in empowering ways.

I have also attempted to look closely at teaching practice in order to shift the conversations from what is taught to how it is taught. I have long contended that pedagogy is under-theorized in education and often takes a back seat to curriculum, as if the pedagogy were implied by the selection of curricular materials. I stand by this body of work as showing that, under the right conditions, all youth can learn and produce at very high levels, even in ways that garner achievement in the academy. However, I think this work points to more than a limited set of findings; it highlights a process whereby leaders in English education illuminate the powerful English practices that are happening in the schools and classrooms where they research and teach.

While there has certainly been dismissal and outright critique from policy circles against this kind of work, we need to insist on the importance of local action and design-based research in schools and classrooms. Just as with medicine or engineering, innovative models need to be tested in optimal conditions before they can be scaled up or replicated. We have millions of potential sites for this kind of work. What we need now are three focused efforts: collaborations between practitioners and researchers, action research by teachers in their own classrooms, and more English Education leaders who are convening
groups of action researchers and mining the existing research to connect the dots around important findings and promising hypotheses.

**Leadership in English Educational Policy and Advocacy**

While we must remain diligent in classroom practice and teacher preparation, we are also challenged to consider the impact of our work on larger conversations concerning English Educational policy. We live in an age when everyone has an opinion about education and when major educational policies that affect millions of lives are being crafted. This is certainly exciting because the federal attention on education can divert much-needed resources into classrooms and schools. But this is also a time for some concern as those persons influencing the decisions around educational policy are rarely those with the most connection to classroom practice.

I worry when teachers and teacher educators are not heard during debates about policies that are going to affect their daily lives. When we consider this reality, we have two options—we can complain or we can look for ways to make sure that our voices are heard. I personally am more focused on the latter, but this foray into the world of educational policy making will take some resolve. We first have to develop defensible positions, and we need to figure out the best ways to communicate our reasoning to the public. As an organization, we have made tremendous strides over the past several years in this regard, but we must devote even more time and resources to developing our messages, and we must continue to develop the expertise to communicate these messages effectively.

Finally, we must acknowledge that there is no automatic and direct correlation between the production of knowledge through educational research and the enactment of policy in education. As teachers, teacher educators, and university-based researchers, we can advocate through data as we develop a consensus on what excellent English education can look like, and we can profile successful classrooms where students are achieving by anyone’s definition. But if we are going to bring about change on a macro level, and if we are going to significantly transform outcomes for all of America's students, then we must also become advocates for students, for teachers, for communities, and for the profession.

How do we best advocate? I believe that we need to advocate as individuals via our local channels of school-site administration and citywide politics, but our true power derives from our numbers. In national organizations such as NCTE and in our local state affiliates, we must push for changes at the state and federal levels based on what we know to be true about effective English teaching. We must fight against policies and practices that are detrimental to the morale of teachers and to the literate futures of our students. Advocacy is not only about having information that matters; it is more importantly about having the courage to act upon that information.

These times require leadership that is knowledgeable, but also courageous. Of course, this courageous leadership is already being manifested in NCTE, which has a recent track record that includes both critical public commentary as well as the establishment of a presence in Washington, DC. It is only the tip of the iceberg. We must be even more deliberate in the upcoming decade as we think collectively about where and how to insert ourselves in national debates about the future of literacy education.

As the son of a historian and high school history teacher, I was taught at a young age that change is not only possible; change is inevitable. The question, then, is not whether we change the world, but how we change it. With this idea in mind, we are challenged to ponder our power as English educational leaders and to consider how we might leverage that power to bring about the changes we need in our classrooms, in our professional organizations, and in our local and federal educational policy.

**References**


Candidates for Member-at-Large

Janelle Oxford, English department chair and guidance counselor, Robinson High School, Robinson, IL; English instructor, Lincoln Trail College, Robinson, IL. Formerly: CEL Hospitality Committee; literacy professional development presenter; new teacher mentor; Illinois State Board of Education Standards Gap Analysis Committee and Teacher Certification System Content Analysis Committee. **Member:** NCTE, IATE, CEL. **Publications:** May 2010 *English Journal.* **Awards:** National Board Certified Teacher (2006); Robinson HS Teacher of the Year; VFW Robinson Post and IL District 17 Citizenship Teacher of the Year; Outstanding Teacher Award, Indiana State University Dept. of Education. **Program Participant:** CEL. **Position Statement:** During an NCTE convention, a friend introduced me to CEL. Since then, I have attended every CEL convention, served on multiple hospitality committees, and presented at three conventions. Involvement in CEL not only inspires us professionally, but also builds “family.” Collegial conversations during sessions and social functions have inspired me to institute change in my own school and classroom, including organizing a schoolwide approach to literacy and structuring a professional learning community. As a member-at-large, I want to encourage others to risk instituting change. I want to continue building CEL by encouraging all educational leaders to participate in this vital network of professionals and to provide support for educators working in unique school settings through outreach opportunities.

Missy Nieveen Phegley, Southeast Missouri State University, assistant professor of English, WPA; FYC Committee, chair; Dual Credit Committee, chair. Formerly: Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, English Education instructor, NCATE program coordinator, assistant WPA; Scott City High School, Scott City, MO, English teacher. **Member:** NCTE (policy advocate), CCCC, CEE, CEL; Board of Program Reviewers, National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education; English Education–Composition Connections SIG; Commission on Writing Teacher Education; Midwest Area Writing Program Administrators (Executive Committee Member/Treasurer). **Publications:** Beyond the Blank Page (with Heath & Beauchamp, 2010); “Cross-Level Collaboration: Students and Teachers Learning from Each Other” (with Oxford), *English Journal,* 99.5 (2010), 27-34; “The Tide Is Turning: A New(er) Genre of Academic Scholarship,” *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy* 14.1 (2009); “Communicating on Local Issues: Exploring Audience in Persuasive Letter Writing,” ReadWriteThink, 2006. **Program Participant:** CEL, CCCC, NCTE, MAWPA, Thomas R. Watson, Write to Learn. **Position Statement:** In expanding our membership, we must facilitate conversations among leaders at all levels. The more we talk and build relationships, the more proactive we can be at federal and state levels and the more effectively we can do our work.

Jennifer Prince, High school English teacher, Indiana Connections Academy, Indianapolis; Adjunct English instructor, Ivy Tech Community College, Indianapolis; Executive Secretary, Assembly for Expanded Perspective on Learning (AEPL). **Formerly:** English teacher, Jaccen-Del Jr./Sr. High School, Osgood, IN; Adjunct Education instructor, Indiana University; Adjunct English instructor, IUPUI. **Member:** NCTE, CEL, AERA, AEPL, ALAN, Indiana Teachers of Writing (ITW), National Rural Educators Association (NREA). **Awards:** NEH Summer Scholar (2010); Coca-Cola Educator of Distinction Award (2009); IUPUI Athlete’s Favorite Professor Award (2006). **Program Participant:** NCTE, CEL, ALAN, AEPL, WLU, NREA, ITW.
2011 CEL Ballot

The CEL bylaws permit members to vote either by mail or at the CEL business session of the NCTE Annual Convention. Each member mailing a ballot should mark it and mail it in an envelope with a return name and address to: Ken Spurlock, CEL Ballots, 2705 Tanglewood Court, Villa Hills, KY 41017.

Ballots must be postmarked no later than November 1, 2011. Members who prefer to vote at the Convention will be given a ballot and an envelope at the business session of CEL. An institution with membership may designate one individual as the representative to vote on its behalf. Please list the institution’s name and address on the outside of the envelope.

Position Statement: I am continually impressed with the diversity of leadership within CEL (i.e., post-secondary, secondary, elementary, urban, rural, bricks & mortar, online learning). At each CEL conference, colleagues freely exchange strategies that we can apply to various educational roles. As methods in education continue to evolve and CEL strives to meet the critical need for breadth of leadership, I will bring my varied expertise as a face-to-face and online educator of rural and urban secondary and post-secondary students. Furthermore, I will enhance CEL by helping the organization significantly increase its membership while also continuing its mission to “foster an intimate professional community dedicated to building the leadership capacity of literacy educators.”

Elizabeth Spencer, English department head (5 years), Administrator’s Association president, and University of Connecticut Early College Experience instructor—Brookfield High School, Brookfield, CT. Formerly: English teacher (12 years); English department liaison; NEASC Standards Committee chair; newspaper advisor. Member: NCTE, CEL, New England Association for Teachers of English (NEATE), ASCD. Program Participant: NCTE; Connecticut Council for Teachers of English; CT Writing Project; CT Advanced Preparation for Literacy specialist.

Position Statement: CEL has been a critical support for me as I pursued my role as a leader in English education, and I therefore want to contribute to the future of the organization. Holding a leadership position in language arts is unique, rewarding, and demanding because a student’s proficiency in literacy influences all learning. We share an incredible responsibility in how we impact the educational experience of students. Having a supportive network that can provide professional resources as well as personal connections is invaluable. I seek the position of Member-at-Large in order to support and grow our membership, expand the mentorship program for new leaders, and respond to membership needs and interests at our annual convention.

Member-at-Large (vote for two)
- Janelle Oxford
- Missy Nieveen Phegley
- Jennifer Prince
- Elizabeth Spencer
- ____________________ (write in candidate)

Call for Candidates for CEL 2012 Election

In the 2012 election, CEL members will choose an Associate Chair and two Members-at-Large. The Nominating Committee is now ready to accept nominees for next year’s election. To be eligible for Associate Chair, a nominee must have been or currently be serving as an elected or appointed member of the CEL Executive Committee. The Associate Chair has many duties, such as presiding at business meetings in the absence of the Chair and coordinating the CEL State Liaison Network and the Exemplary Leadership award. The term of the Associate Chair is six years (two as Associate Chair, two as Chair, and two as Past Chair). To be eligible for Member-at-Large, a nominee generally will have attended two or more CEL conventions and volunteered in some capacity, such as working on the Hospitality Committee or presenting/presiding at a concurrent session. A Member-at-Large represents the general membership on the Executive Committee and assists in planning functions of the Executive Committee. The term of the Member-at-Large is three years. Two candidates for Associate Chair and four candidates for Member-at-Large will be on the 2012 ballot. Those who wish to nominate a qualified CEL member should check with the individual and affirm her/his willingness to serve prior to submitting a nomination letter. Nominations should include as much pertinent information as possible about the nominee as a leader and her/his involvement in CEL as well as contact information (home mailing address, email address, and phone number). Nominations may be mailed by November 1 to Ken Spurlock, CEL Nominations Chair, 2705 Tanglewood Court, Villa Hills, KY 41017, emailed to ken46s@fuse.net by November 1, or hand-delivered to Spurlock at the 2011 Convention in Chicago.
Call for Manuscripts/Future Issues

The English Leadership Quarterly, a publication of the NCTE Conference on English Leadership (CEL), seeks articles of 500–5,000 words on topics of interest to those in positions of leadership in departments (elementary, secondary, or college) where English is taught. Informal, first-hand accounts of successful research, teaching, and learning activities related to themes of upcoming issues, are encouraged. Themes of upcoming issues include:

April 2012 (deadline December 16, 2011)
Reading for Fun

August 2012 (deadline April 13, 2012)
Ready for the Real World? (see call, p. 14)

Submission Guidelines: 1) Manuscripts should address the theme listed in the call for manuscripts for that issue. 2) Manuscripts should be double-spaced with 1-inch margins in 12-point font. 3) Manuscripts should follow the current edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. 4) Manuscripts should be accompanied by a cover letter, which includes the theme the article addresses, a bulleted list of key points the article addresses, author name(s), affiliation, work address, work phone number, fax number, and email address. Manuscripts will not be reviewed without the cover letter. Email a copy of your manuscript and a cover letter to Susan Groenke at sgroenke@utk.edu. Make sure that when sending your electronic submission, you indicate in the subject line of the email the issue date for which you are submitting (e.g., August 2012 ELQ). ●