The Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) explicitly state that the Standards do not define “how teachers should teach” (p. 6) and that teachers are “free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards” (p. 4). A few years into its implementation, however, some elementary teachers question what’s left of their professional autonomy and wonder if they are only free to do good literacy teaching if they close their classroom doors. The previous special issue of Language Arts dedicated to the CCSS (March, 2014), for example, included such prescient images as the CCSS “invad[ing] your space/One more top down reform/You are going to have to face” (Ford, 2014, p. 269) and teachers “retreat[ing] once again/to the cracks of their imaginations and privacy of their/classrooms/to engage in authentic teaching” (Meyer, 2014, p. 270). In our work as teacher educators, we hear echoes of those sentiments in the talk of preservice and practicing teachers. They mention, for instance, covering their door windows and secretly slipping poetry read-alouds and dress-up stations into daily schedules already packed with “CCSS-approved” informational texts. Despite our best efforts to read and reread the CCSS with them for assurances of freedom, however, teachers often still do not feel free. In our conversations with them, for example, we hear questions similar to those that NCTE\(^1\) recognized (Long, Hutchinson, & Neiderhiser, 2011) as prevalent among literacy teachers nationwide (e.g., “Will my curriculum be narrowed?” [p. 11], “Where is there room for children’s play in these standards?” [p. 19], “Am I wrong to think that the CCSS will undercut teacher authority?” [p. 13]). When we return to the document with teachers to read the fine print, so-to-speak, it discredits many myths that circulate around the Standards. But no matter how closely we read, it does little to assuage discomfort. Indeed, more often than not, an aura of doubt about the “open-ended nature of the Standards and [their] assurance of professional autonomy” (Long, Hutchinson, & Neiderhiser, 2011, p. 11) lingers in conversations about the CCSS. It is as if nobody believes what the Standards say. We are beginning to question whether it is possible to read the CCSS in ways that might help literacy teachers feel free to teach with the door open.

In this article, we take up that question by drawing upon the ideas of French philosopher Michel Foucault, who does not approach freedom as an ideal that can be achieved once-and-for-all or be granted by a governing body, rule, or mandated text (e.g., Standards document). Rather, for Foucault (1984), freedom “must be exercised” (p. 245) from multiple points in innumerable relations. The task of a reader of the CCSS, then, is to not take declarations of freedom at face value and instead embrace a skepticism of the idea that freedom can be granted by an external authority. With such a skepticism in mind, daily conversations among teachers about the CCSS can become productive spaces to search for multiple, shifting ways to exercise freedom. In other words, teachers can work together to read the CCSS in ways that highlight how we are “much freer than [we] feel” (Foucault, 1982/1988, p. 10) and that there actually are all sorts of options available for acting/thinking/teaching in the ways we believe best serve our students.

To explore that freedom, we describe a study in which we used a metaphor as a tool for thinking
about Foucauldian freedom in relation to the Standards. Specifically, we analyzed the CCSS using the metaphor of hashtagging, a concept borrowed from social networking (e.g., Twitter, Instagram).

Hashtags are created by social media users when the hash character (#) is used as a prefix for any word or unspaced-phrase and used to tag (i.e., label) various ideas, images, texts, etc. For example, a quick search of #momoftheyear on Twitter shows such diverse content as sentimental thanks to users’ mothers, sarcastic memes poking fun at the daily difficulties of motherhood, and links to videos illustrating the complexity of one mother’s decision to discipline her son during the Baltimore riots. Thinking with the hashtag metaphor illuminated how the Standards may limit the circulation of diverse ideas about literacy teaching. That is, the Standards make it appear as if some literacy concepts do not need to be, and perhaps cannot be, circulated as hashtags. Importantly, imagining literacy concepts as hashtags also enabled us to insert complexity into the Standards when we felt limited by singular interpretations. Such complexity renders the CCSS flexible enough to be rewritten in multiple contexts—an absolute necessity to prepare students for 21st century literacies yet to come. We hope our study offers an example of how Foucauldian freedom can be put to work in conversations about the CCSS.

We begin by situating our study within the current educational climate that demands a healthy skepticism toward the freedom the CCSS claims to grant. We then describe the hashtag metaphor in more detail and explain how we used that metaphor as our mode of inquiry in a two-phase study. We follow those descriptions with the findings of each phase and conclude with implications of those findings for literacy teachers who feel trapped behind closed doors.

**But We Don’t Feel Free!**

As teacher educators who read widely about the CCSS and interact with literacy teachers, practicing teachers, and community educators in a variety of capacities, we have begun to formulate ideas about why teachers may not feel free to draw upon their professional expertise to design literacy instruction. One significant issue that has arisen in discussions in the literature and in our discussions with teachers is how it is difficult to determine what the CCSS actually says when anyone and everyone has an interpretation. An ever-expanding network of curriculum materials, guides for implementation, supplementary materials put out by the CCSS, state and local government documents, principal mandates, and suggestions from grade level chairs, for example, put a finer and finer point on what the Standards mean. In other words, teachers working in schools today are inundated by “‘they say you have to’ rumors” (e.g., Long, Hutchinson, & Neiderhiser, 2012).

### INTO THE CLASSROOM WITH READWRITETHINK

**#writingreadingconnection**

One of the hashtags explored was #writingreadingconnection. ReadWriteThink.org has a suite of lesson plans that explore and build upon possible interpretations of this connection. They are called “Book Report Alternatives” (http://bit.ly/1sHq27m). There are dozens of activities inviting students to write or create artifacts after reading a text. Some examples include the following:

- Writing Resumes for Characters in Historical Fiction: http://bit.ly/1LMw5jk

Lisa Storm Fink
www.ReadWriteThink.org

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We conceived our study because we are desperate for optimism in the face of such constraints. In the larger context of the accountability movement, the old standbys that teachers have relied on to feel free disappear under increasing surveillance that forces teachers’ practices to be seen, scrutinized, and judged. All too often, we hear stories from innovative and creative elementary teachers who say they cannot take one more day of teaching in a public school where high-stakes tests are singular accountability measures. Furthermore, our students wonder why they should even enter into a profession where they will be belittled and mistrusted, perhaps even suspected of cheating. We often feel like we don’t have adequate answers. Recommending that teachers wait for the educational tide to turn or suggesting they overthrow the broken system is not helpful because they are often already too overwhelmed. Thus, we turned to Foucault, like others before us (Compton- Lilly, 2011; Kontovourki & Siegel, 2009), to understand other possibilities for action in the face of the seemingly insurmountable.

Kontovourki and Siegel (2009), for example, discuss the possibility of exercising freedom—what they term “wiggle room” (p. 37)—in day-to-day practices. Despite the fact that a mandated curriculum narrowed what was possible in the classroom, there were ways to “play” with(in) the mandate by exceeding its boundaries, continuously expanding possibilities for literacy teaching and learning. In other words, it was possible to “recruit the instability of power . . . to enact meaningful curricula” (p. 34) by locating and using available wiggle room to disrupt existing authoritative structures. We undertook similar work in “Rewriting the Common Core State Standards for Tomorrow’s Literacies” (Van Cleave & Bridges-Rhoads, 2014) as we explored possibilities for exercising freedom when the CCSS explicitly privileges certain authors (e.g., Shakespeare) and text types (e.g., print-based). We take a different perspective on that work below by focusing on the moments when our freedom seems guaranteed and yet is disrupted by nearly imperceptible strategies that constrain us.

By complicating those moments of apparent freedom, we do not mean to add an additional layer of other people’s interpretations of the CCSS that tell them what is and isn’t allowed in the Standards. Pearson and Hiebert (2013), for example, explained that although the CCSS is “noteworthy (and a refreshing change from the ‘mandate’ frenzy of NCLB) for the degrees of freedom that they cede to the local level, even classroom teachers” (p. 15), the Standards are not the only document that educators must “deal with” (p. 15). Those other documents may undercut the intentions of the CCSS designers, such as the Publishers’ Criteria on the CCSS website that provide support for aligning materials with the Standards (achievethecore.org). Because that criteria aimed to inform the proliferation of curriculum materials, according to Pearson and Hiebert (2013), the CCSS “[p]romise[d] teachers some professional choice in the standards and then direct[ed] publishers to write teacher guides with scripts that remove all the choice!” (p. 16). In short, the CCSS pulled a “bait and switch” (p. 15).

Such contradictions provide evidence for teachers that their supposed freedom to teach how they see fit is actually a myth. Those contradictions also reinforce prevalent beliefs that the CCSS was based on assumptions that teachers can and should be “content delivery mechanisms” (Whitney, 2014, p. 298) and “consumers, not agents” (Shannon, 2014, p. 300). It makes sense, then, that questions are raised about whether the Standards were designed with the intent to limit a teacher’s professional authority. As McDermott (2013) demonstrated, anyone who must deal with the Standards is caught up in a labyrinthine network of corporate and political interests that have little to do with improving the state of education. Given all of these barriers, who wouldn’t want to retreat to their classrooms, close the door, and just teach? We conceived our study because we are desperate for optimism in the face of such constraints. In the larger context of the accountability movement, the old standbys that teachers have relied on to feel free disappear under increasing surveillance that forces teachers’ practices to be seen, scrutinized, and judged. All too often, we hear stories from innovative and creative elementary teachers who say they cannot take one more day of teaching in a public school where high-stakes tests are singular accountability measures. Furthermore, our students wonder why they should even enter into a profession where they will be belittled and mistrusted, perhaps even suspected of cheating. We often feel like we don’t have adequate answers. Recommending that teachers wait for the educational tide to turn or suggesting they overthrow the broken system is not helpful because they are often already too overwhelmed. Thus, we turned to Foucault, like others before us (Compton- Lilly, 2011; Kontovourki & Siegel, 2009), to understand other possibilities for action in the face of the seemingly insurmountable.

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By complicating those moments of apparent freedom, we do not mean to add an additional layer
to the hopelessness that many teachers already feel about the Standards. Rather, the goal is to position teachers (ourselves included) as players in what Foucault (1984/1997) called “games of truth” (p. 281) so that we can develop our own strategies for exercising professional authority. That is, we hope our study gives teachers ideas about how they can participate with the CCSS as knowledge producers, using the concrete image of the hashtag to help expand and redefine concepts in the Standards that can accommodate multiple contexts and student needs.

Hashtagging and Foucauldian Freedom

As mentioned, our study does not examine what the CCSS and its many related documents intend or mean. Instead, we use tagging as a metaphor to engage with Foucault’s ideas about how knowledge (e.g., meanings, truths, interpretations) is continuously produced as language organizes into ways of thinking, speaking, and acting. Foucault (1981/2000) called this discourse. In discourse, people take up seemingly unrelated ideas, images, gestures, objects, etc. and apply the same word or label to them. A concept like writing, for example, is used to continuously define and redefine what counts as writing when practices like using a pencil to create a print-based, linear, narrative text are described as writing. Because labels like writing are used differently in day-to-day conversations and interactions in various contexts, many “truths” about what writing is circulate simultaneously. Consequently, in discourse, multiple and even contradictory truths about ourselves, others, and the world are in competition to establish the truth or the meaning of a concept.

The metaphor of tagging in social media helps us understand how such competition works. When users of Instagram, for instance, use #writing to tag various photographs, that tag continuously defines and redefines what counts as writing. The meaning of #writing holds only for a moment and contains contradictions because people use the same tag to refer to many things. However, each user’s tag is not treated equally. In fact, the impact of a tag is related to a variety of factors, such as how many followers a user has, the user’s position in society, and even the time of day a post is made. If two literacy researchers, like us, tag a child’s podcast as #writing on Twitter, it will have nowhere near the impact of the same podcast tagged by NCTE. NCTE has over 30,000 followers on Twitter and an even wider audience at an NCTE conference where their Tweets are displayed on boards lining the hallways. When NCTE labels a podcast with #writing, it is re-Tweeted, or reposted, thousands of times and immediately shared with all of that user’s followers. Quickly, it begins to circulate as a truth about writing. If it is reposted enough in a variety of situations by multiple others, that description of writing can begin to function as the truth. It can even become difficult to imagine multiple ways of teaching and learning writing.

For us, tagging became a concrete way to explore how documents like the CCSS utilize a number of strategies (some intended and some likely not) that limit what can be thought, said, or done in relation to literacy teaching and learning. If the Standards provide an example of a child using a pencil as writing, it is as if they are metaphorically tagging that description with #writing. That description can then be “re-Tweeted” by publishers, administrators, grade level chairs, and so on, affecting how teachers think about teaching writing—even when they don’t feel constrained. The optimism in Foucauldian analysis is that “things can be changed” because what we think of as true, normal, or right is actually quite “fragile” (1981/2000, p. 173). By recognizing the various ways in which concepts are presented as stable, finished, and singular, we can begin to exercise freedom by inserting concepts as hashtags into fast-moving conversations where multiple and contradictory interpretations circulate—giving them...
back the mobility that they had and that they should always have” (Foucault, 1983/1996, p. 412).

**Hashtagging as Inquiry**

To do this type of Foucauldian inquiry, we analyzed the CCSS and ancillary documents related to the CCSS (e.g., introduction, appendices, website). Rather than performing an exhaustive analysis of any set of documents, Foucault (1976/1978) suggested that analysis begin with what is “the most immediate, the most local” (p. 97). That is, we started with what felt close to home so that we could analyze what seemed the most immediately problematic. We did not, however, determine which literacy concepts we would analyze in advance. Instead, we used writing as a mode of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) to think about (often in writing) the CCSS with our own contexts and the Foucauldian metaphor of tagging in mind. Writing in this way allowed us to heed Foucauldian scholars Scheurich and McKenzie’s (2005) advice to engage with Foucault’s ideas as a whole—reading and writing across multiple texts rather than choosing just one.

For example, we read Foucault—lots of Foucault—alongside the CCSS, and we talked, thought, and wrote (more than 150 pages of writing!) about that reading in relation to our experiences and observations. In that process, we identified concepts (e.g., writing, reading) that need to remain open and flexible (e.g., in need of a hashtag) to accommodate expanding notions of literacies we encounter in our work (e.g., in our readings of academic literature such as Landow [2006] and Dobrin, Rice, & Vastola [2011], as well as in our interactions in classrooms, with our students, and with educators). In this sense, analysis was an effort to read, think, and understand the CCSS in ways that might help us imagine multiple ways of literacy teaching that were in line with the CCSS.

Although the processes of thinking and writing as analysis are messy, non-linear, and ongoing (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), we organize some of that analysis below into two phases, focusing on just one concept in the CCSS, the Integrated Model of Literacy. Phase One examines the strategies the Standards use (whether intentional or not) to centralize knowledge about the Integrated Model of Literacy within the text. Phase Two analyzes the effects of utilizing the hashtag as a concrete strategy for exercising freedom. That is, we turn a seemingly stable concept into a hashtag and examine the effects of putting that hashtag into metaphorical circulation.

We begin below with a statement that introduces the Integrated Model of Literacy in the CCSS.

**Hashtagging the Standards: A Two-Part Analysis**

“Although the Standards are divided into Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language strands for conceptual clarity, the processes of...
communication are closely connected, as reflected throughout this document” (Integrated Model of Literacy, p. 4).

It is easy to read the above quotation as an indication of the freedom the CCSS grants to literacy teachers to teach how they see fit. Such a statement implies that in order to teach in a way that is consistent with how communication works (e.g., the processes of communication are closely connected), a teacher can and perhaps should think across Standards. Indeed, the Standards reinforce that idea elsewhere by explicitly stating, “[E]ach standard need not be a separate focus for instruction and assessment” (p. 5). Since the Standards separate those processes into strands, a teacher must use her discretion to determine how best to teach across strands without explicit guidance from the CCSS—a move that will certainly impact her instructional decisions (e.g., materials she should use, organization of the classroom, what content she defines as reading or writing). In fact, Williams, Homan, and Swofford (2011) cite the “Integration of Threads” as an important concept that inevitably “prompt[s] shifts in our thinking” from previous policy documents (p. 17). Since the CCSS does not define “how teachers should teach” (CCSS, p. 6), though, a literacy teacher can seemingly make all sorts of decisions about how best to integrate literacy processes in her classroom and still claim them as sanctioned by the CCSS (e.g., tag them with #IntegratedModelofLiteracy). She should, in other words, feel free to integrate literacy processes with the door open.

She might, for example, hang a schedule outside her classroom door that provides no distinction between reading and writing time, highlighting that those literacy practices can and must occur simultaneously—similar to how Fletcher and Portalupi (2001) questioned whether it is possible to be a good writer without reading like a writer. Or she might engage her class in collaborative writing on Google Docs, in which no particular reader/writer controls the direction of the piece and writers become readers and readers become writers. Such participation with the words, images, and hyperlinks posted in digital spaces does, after all (according to media theorist George Landow [2006]), change the relationship between readers and writers because it turns a text into a choose-your-own-adventure in which the reader controls the direction of the text.

With these examples in mind, such supposed freedom to choose materials, organize one’s classroom, and engage students in a variety of experiences that integrate literacy processes is both exciting and important because it echoes what many teachers and researchers understand about how people actually communicate—especially what is known about writing both in and out of digital environments.

Foucault (1976/1978) reminds us, however, that within mandates like the Standards, we are

Create or Join a Google+ Community

Andy finds that Google+ communities push his thinking and get him connected to other educators doing exciting work. He started a community, GlobalTL, that connects librarians around the world. He is also part of an online community for Google Certified Innovators “where we ask, share, and support one another.”

Tag Developers

When Andy uses Twitter to share the Standards-based projects his students are working on, he often tags the developers of applications they use “so that they can see what the product looks like in a school, how kids are really using it.” As he said, when “the developers see that I’m really taking time to be reflective about my work and put it out in a public way, then they really are very open to connecting with us.” Check out Andy’s blog, Expect the Miraculous, at expectmiraculous.com or follow him on Twitter, @plemmonsa.
necessarily prompted to think about concepts in some ways while excluding others. The fact that the CCSS calls the strands “processes of communication,” for example, reinforces the understanding of writing as an individual linear process rather than a collaborative practice that occurs across time and space (Dobrin, Rice, & Vastola, 2011). Furthermore, the statement that processes are “closely connected” means that it may be impossible for teachers to dissolve the separations between them entirely. Even though we may feel free, then, there are imperceptible assumptions about literacy teaching and learning at work in the text that limit what counts as sanctioned literacy instruction. That is, they solidify the Integrated Model of Literacy as a stable construct that can only be defined by the Standards document itself instead of being free to circulate as a hashtag within a network of interpretations and associated practices. Rather than feeling duped by the apparent erasure of freedom, however, Foucauldian analysis allows us to work “at a level of detail where action and transformation seem more open” (Rabinow & Rose, 2003, p. iv).

**Phase One: Closing Down the Network**

In documents like the CCSS, there are multiple levels of strategies in multiple locations. Compton-Lilly (2011), for example, drew upon Foucault to analyze how certain texts (e.g., a teacher guidebook) are “imbued with power” (p. 432) when they are recognized as authorities of knowledge and teachers are expected to “consult the text on a regular basis” (p. 435). In those situations, it becomes difficult to think that any other sources of knowledge are necessary, especially because designers of texts can employ additional strategies that consolidate meaning and authority within the text to the extent that it appears beyond question.

The CCSS document is similarly imbued with power. As we describe below, it also uses specific strategies to reinforce itself as an all-powerful entity that is beyond question, thus centralizing knowledge about literacy teaching (e.g., Integrated Model of Literacy).

**Centralizing Knowledge**

The designers of the CCSS employ a number of strategies for establishing the document’s authority. The first sentence of the Introduction reads:

> The Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (“the Standards”) are the culmination of an extended, broad-based effort to fulfill the charge issued by the states to create the next generation of K–12 standards in order to help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school. (p. 3)

In that sentence, the document names the CCSS as “the Standards,” organizing into one recognizable entity the numerous ideas that presumably circulated about literacy learning during the process of fulfilling its charge. Just as Foucault (1969/1977) describes how a literary author’s name is useful for grouping various texts under a common label, naming the CCSS document “the Standards” produces a guise of sameness. Each time the text refers to itself (which is quite often), it becomes increasingly recognizable as a thing—something different than “ordinary everyday speech that merely comes and goes” (Foucault, 1969/1977, p. 382). Further, such repetition reinforces the idea that the Standards have a high status—one that positions the Standards as above reproach because they contain all relevant, up-to-date, and essential information and have erased all conflicts that may have existed about that information. The concepts presented by the Standards, then, appear not to need a hashtag because they have already been defined by an arduous process, are permanent and complete, and are not open to being rewritten at any moment by any user.

To solidify its authority, the Standards also tap into the organizing structures (e.g., government institutions, prior standards documents, international precedent) that have already established ELA standards as both necessary and important. In the span of one sentence, the framers of the CCSS draw on three institutional powers that gave them...
authority, either explicitly or tacitly—a move that bolsters the authority of the Standards. The Standards also describe themselves in relation to other education stakeholders, “including state departments of education, scholars, assessment developers, professional organizations, educators from kindergarten through college, and parents, students, and other members of the public” (p. 3) as well as “the most important international models” (p. 3). With all that expertise in their corner, it seems logical, almost natural, that the Standards can claim themselves as the ultimate authority, “a synthesis of the best elements of standards-related work [and indeed the best ideas related to literacy learning] to date and an important advance over that previous work” (p. 3). However, as Foucault (1976/1978) suggested, “power is exercised from innumerable points” (p. 94), such as in the Standard’s statements about Integrated Model of Literacy.

**Erasing the Hashtag**

In its statements about the Integrated Model of Literacy and related discussion throughout the text, the Standards continue to centralize authority by limiting access to the ideas that informed their thinking. First and foremost, there are no direct citations (e.g., no references about researchers, texts, or theories) that operationalize or theorize the terms “integrated literacy,” “closely connected,” or “processes of communication.” Instead, the only information offered is apparently “reflected throughout the document” (p. 4). This invitation to keep reading the text makes it appear as if there is no need to access the multiple conversations that circulate about those concepts outside the text or to search for examples of how one might put those concepts to work in a classroom. In other words, it is as if the concepts are fixed and singular, with their meanings contained in the text, instead of hashtags that can be readily put to use by a variety of classroom teachers.

Claiming that all necessary knowledge is in the document further imbues the CCSS with power and enables the Standards to provide clarification about the Integrated Model of Literacy throughout the text without sparking suspicion that they are narrowing instructional options. Directly following the declaration that more information is “reflected throughout the document,” the CCSS provides an example that connects two of those processes (writing and reading) in only one specific way: “For example, Writing Standard 9 requires that students be able to write about what they read” (Introduction, p. 4). Both Anchor Standard 9 for Writing as well as the accompanying grade-level Standards provide further examples of how reading and writing are connected by stating that students should use writing to demonstrate that they can “[d]raw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research” (p. 18). Those examples do connect reading and writing, but only to a certain extent, because the processes must remain separate enough for a student to use writing to describe what she had read.

The almost imperceptible narrowing of the Integrated Model of Literacy continues when Standard 9 is described elsewhere, further limiting how literacy processes might be connected: “Standard 9 stresses the importance of the writing–reading connection by requiring students to draw upon and write about evidence from literary and informational texts” (p. 8). Importantly, that statement refers to the (singular) writing–reading connection as if there is only one way for writing and reading to interact. Because there are no citations, it also appears as if that one way of understanding the connection between writing and reading is so commonly understood that it does not require explanation. Even the NCTE books led us back to those same places in the Standards we had already read. In short, despite our efforts to locate further explanation, rather than a network of ideas, we found a reference loop that limited our freedom to connect reading and writing in multiple ways.

In Phase One of our analysis, it became clear how despite the Standards’ claim that teachers have the authority to teach as they see fit, there are a number of strategies at work (e.g., use of definite articles, lack of citations, references to other statements in the text, continuous reference to the document as the Standards) that limit such freedom. That analysis enables us to understand how teachers might doubt whether their instructional practices are in line with the CCSS.
**Phase Two: Expanding the Network**

With Foucauldian analysis, however, explaining how trapped we are is not the end of our work. As Scheurich and McKenzie (2005) asserted, describing constraints does not actually tell us how to be free. If we stopped analysis at this point, we would certainly want to close the door on the Standards. However, as Foucault (1983/1996) described, “by changing a certain number of things . . . what appears obvious to us is not at all so obvious” (p. 412). Our Foucauldian analysis of the Standards, then, must use to our advantage the recognition that in order to maintain authority, the Standards had to erase references to any conversation in circulation outside of the text (i.e., close the loop). Therefore, Phase Two disrupted the perception that we are inevitably trapped, making it seem less obviously true, and thus allowed us to exercise freedom.

**#writingreadingconnection**

To exercise freedom, we turned “the writing–reading connection” into a hashtag by replacing the with a # to metaphorically access and participate in the network of ideas that circulate around writing and reading connections. #writingreadingconnection can be used to label diverse ideas, images, and so on. Importantly, it can also be put into contact with other hashtags because users can label the same image or idea with multiple hashtags.

For example, #writingreadingconnection can label an image of a child who is sitting at a desk with a book in one hand and a pen and paper in the other, presumably writing to demonstrate her knowledge about reading. When that image is posted on a social networking site like Instagram, the image is immediately put into circulation with other images—both those tagged identically and those carrying other related hashtags. For example, a user can tag an image of two children sitting with a shared iPad as both #writingreadingconnection and #21stcenturyliteracies by listing them side-by-side. Each additional tag extends and complicates how writing–reading connections can be understood and used in classrooms in a potentially exponential variety of ways. A user, then, can make any hashtagged concept her own by circulating it with any and all ideas, texts, and tools she draws upon in her daily practices.

To make this metaphorical work more concrete, we provide one example below of how we put #writingreadingconnection into circulation (at least metaphorically) with a set of teaching tools we often use and want other teachers to feel comfortable using as well— the books, apps, and interviews of author-illustrator Mo Willems. Such a move allowed us to feel free to “provide students with whatever tools and knowledge [our] professional judgment and experience identify” (CCSS, p. 4)

### FOR INQUISITIVE MINDS

**Twitter as Professional Learning**

Andy Plemmons, an innovative media specialist whose work with the Standards inspires us, follows hashtags to see what’s “happening in the bigger picture of education”—“innovative things people are doing, questions they are raising, and barriers they are facing.” He uses that ongoing learning to develop goals for the library (e.g., give students, teachers, and families opportunities to dream, tinker, create, and share; engage in global thinking and global collaboration). He brings those goals to conversations with teachers about the Standards to help them think beyond the Standard written on the page. What follows are some of the hashtags Andy deems most helpful.

#tlchat is a hashtag for teacher librarians to share ideas and resources. #tlchat was a finalist for the 2013 Edublog Awards’ Best Twitter Hashtag. TL Chat holds a live Twitter conversation the second Monday of each month at 8 p.m. EST in a question/answer format. The topics of conversation range from various Standards to great apps to best books and more.
as we imagined ways to teach integrated literacy. It also alerted us to other concepts in the Standards that are presented as immobile and fixed and in need of hashtags.

**#MoWillems**

In our work with elementary children (including our own children) as well as teachers, Mo Willems has been valuable for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, in our experiences with his many books, we often see both children and adults giggle with delight as they flip through the pages. His books are silly, with characters who dance gleefully in the rain or demand for the reader to repeat the word "banana" multiple times. In addition to the fun, Willems is also explicit about his processes as an author and illustrator. In frequent interviews, he shares freely about how he comes up with ideas, how projects go astray mid-writing and drawing, and what he hopes his readers will take away from his texts. This sort of explicit talk has been instrumental in helping us understand and explore with others how texts are constructed.

In the increasingly technological contexts of 21st century literacies, we find his explicit talk about his processes as an author and illustrator useful. In our work preparing teachers, for example, Willems helps us make explicit how one might think about multiple modes (e.g., images, words, sound) together when composing and reading texts. Attention to multiple means of communication and expression (e.g., multimodality) is important in the digital age, yet as Mills and Exley (2014) described, multimodality is a “key omission” (p. 137) in the CCSS. Putting #writingreadingconnection into circulation with #MoWillems, then, frees us up to privilege multimodality.

**#writingreadingconnection #MoWillems**

To metaphorically tag, we imagined an image of a child sitting with a pen and paper in one hand and a Mo Willems text in the other—a scene common in our work with children. Tagging it with #writingreadingconnection and #MoWillems highlights many examples from Willems’s books, interviews, and apps that are useful for thinking about writing and reading connections. In Willems’s Caldecott Honor book *Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!*, for example, the pigeon invites the reader to engage with him throughout the book by asking questions. That is, the pigeon demands that the reader become a character in the book—a writer of the text and not just a reader. Such a writing–reading connection was not accidental. Willems views his readers as collaborators, explaining, “My goal is to write 49 percent of the book, and then to let my audience create the 51 percent” (Braver, 2014, para. 7).

Furthermore, in Willems’s electronic application, “Don’t Let the Pigeon Run This App!”, children are explicitly invited to coauthor. The app

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**#istelib** is the librarian hashtag for the International Society of Technology Education. With the tagline “Our job is to give students a place to #failsafe every. single. day, #istelib gives ideas for helping students think, create, and share, all while emphasizing collaboration and the importance of failing in order to succeed.”

**#makered** is a great hashtag of makerspace resources. Including contributions from elementary, middle, and high school, #makered is sure to inspire you to create makerspaces in your classroom to help students meet the Standards.

There are always exciting Twitter hashtags popping up, such as #suptchat, a conversation among superintendents across the country about teaching and learning.

Follow Andy on Twitter: @plemmonsaa.
translates Willems’s book into a multimodal experience that prompts children for ideas to produce new stories for Pigeon and encourages them to learn to recreate Willems’s drawings of Pigeon. Integrating sound, image, digital writing, and drawing, the application blurs the separation between writing and reading to the point of making the writing–reading connection unintelligible. In any given moment, the reader becomes the writer and the writer the reader.

With such a blurring in mind, it can become challenging to determine who wrote what. In fact, Willems stated his goal is “to facilitate children infringing on [his] copyright” (Minzesheimer, 2011, para. 12). As he explained, “I make sure that the characters in my books . . . are characters that a 4- or a 5-year-old can draw . . . so that it’s at its easiest to copy” (Wrenn, 2013, para. 15). In short, he encourages readers to simultaneously be artists and writers who plagiarize.

Therefore, #writingreadingconnection #MoWillems certainly complicates the relatively straightforward use of the term plagiarism in the Standards (e.g., CCR Anchor Standard 8 says students should be able to “[g]ather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism” (p. 18). Plagiarism, like “the writing–reading connection,” can and must be complicated, especially if we want to help students maneuver “the ethical responsibilities required” in the “complex environments” of 21st century literacies (NCTE, 2013). Importantly, although we used Mo Willems as a tool for the goal of privileging multimodality, #MoWillems exceeded that goal by signaling to still another seemingly fixed concept within the CCSS.

Open the Door and Tag

Our two-part analysis of the CCSS demonstrates how the hashtag metaphor is useful for decentralizing the presumed authority of the Standards. In Phase One, we identified how the Standards centralize knowledge within the document, providing insight into why literacy teachers might not feel free to teach as they deem best, even in the moments when they are granted freedom. Rather than leaving teachers with no options, in Phase Two, we examined how making those strategies visible—though they may seem small and even insignificant—was necessary to “recruit the instability of power” (Kontovourki & Siegel, 2009, p. 34) at work in the text. A focus on just one concept—Integrated Model of Literacy—enabled us to identify and disrupt the certainty about the writing–reading connection. That disruption provided access to a network of ideas that included multiple interpretations of integrated literacy. It also highlighted additional concepts that could be turned into hashtags to keep pace with shifting 21st century literacies.

Such work has important implications for helping literacy teachers feel free to teach with the door open. Importantly, it provides an example of how the CCSS can be read in ways that privilege the wealth of knowledge about literacy concepts circulating outside of the Standards. That knowledge is being produced inside classrooms and schools each time literacy teachers tag (i.e., label) instruction with a literacy concept in the Standards. Just because the Standards limit access to that network does not mean that we must as well. In fact, by closing the classroom door and teaching, we are actively limiting the network of ideas we can use to think about literacy teaching and learning. What if instead we opened the door to conversations about the CCSS that continuously expand our networks, sparked by questions such as Where can I go? What can I read? Who can I ask to find other ways to think about a literacy concept? Or even How can we tag this literacy concept? It may indeed be less tempting to close the door if we invite conversations about the CCSS within our schools, including questions that explore multiple networks of ideas about any and all literacy concepts in the Standards.

Imagine what might happen if we expanded those conversations even further. What if we actually put hashtags into circulation on Twitter? We (and literacy teachers everywhere) could access the
network of ideas others use to design practice—networks that remain inaccessible behind closed doors. Because every user necessarily understands and uses tags differently, based on sociocultural factors, local contexts, and individual goals, there is no limit to the network. Google Certified Innovator and media specialist Andy Plemmons (see sidebars), for instance, provides access to his unique approach to the Standards on his blog (expectmiraculous.com). His approach draws upon his readings (e.g., professional literature, blog posts, Twitter) and experiences (e.g., international conferences, Google Teacher Academy). Accessing an ever-expanding network of ideas as we read the Standards is a practice of freedom that continuously disrupts the authority of the CCSS.

Putting hashtags into a social network (whether in person or online) might also allow us to see “what we do do” (Foucault as cited in Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 187). Whitney (2014), for instance, highlighted the importance of teachers sharing descriptions of how and why they teach in order to tell “parents and others in the community that teachers are doing things for reasons, thoughtful and informed reasons, and that we ought to consult them for guidance about what they are doing” (p. 300). Those ideas may catalyze change in ways we cannot even imagine. They may also, however, become the new certainty—a hashtag can begin trending, images can go viral—thus solidifying certain meanings of concepts as the truth over time. A grade-level team can collectively translate a CCSS concept into instructional practice and repeat that translation from year-to-year. Or #writingreadingconnection can become a trending topic on Twitter that is used so often to tag the same classroom activity that the concept seems stable. Opening the door and putting hashtags into circulation in different ways, then, can keep literacy teachers on our toes.

The optimism in this approach is that the Standards don’t mean any one thing. Rather, we (and all teachers) create the meaning of the Standards in every instructional moment. Our work is never done, however. As Foucault (1983) explained, knowledge is always being centralized and decentralized so “everything is dangerous. . . . If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do” (pp. 231–232).

Notes

1. The National Council of Teachers of English published a series of books titled Supporting Students in a Time of Core Standards that is available for multiple grade levels. (See https://secure.ncte.org/store/books/series/supporting.)
2. We do not presume a one-to-one correspondence between tagging and Foucault’s theories. Rather, we use them together to explore what thinking and action are provoked when we assume a reflexive and recursive connection.

References


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