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ADOPTING A CRITICAL INQUIRY APPROACH FOR IMPLEMENTING THE COMMON CORE

Although she loved her work teaching English in a Michigan high school, Steffany Maher began to wonder if something was missing. Reflecting on this worry, she explained:

> Our discussions were primarily "me" focused. I was imparting all my "teacher wisdom" unto my students, but they were not fully engaged in the conversation. My teacher-led discussion method was not allowing students to respond to the literature, and no matter how many times I told them that any response to what they were reading was valid, they were always looking to me for the "right" answers.
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> I knew I wanted to take a different approach to the next novel I would be teaching—*To Kill a Mockingbird*. I have read Louise Rosenblatt's classic *Literature as Exploration*. She argues something that all of us as teachers and readers understand: when our students read, they bring their own history, experience, emotions, and education to the text. How could I help my students to find their own meaning in the literature they were reading? How could I simultaneously help them to engage with the text and inquire into the relevance of its historical and social contexts?
>
> (Steffany Maher essay)

We begin this book with Steffany's questions because we believe that she is on to something important about teaching English. As students read, write, and learn about the world we think that questions, more than answers, are at the heart of good English teaching. The questions that Steffany asks in particular—How do good teachers bring the experience, emotions, and background of their students to the classroom? How do good teachers help students understand historical and social contexts in ways that are relevant—are crucial to the approach we offer in this book for teaching to exceed the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

Critically Examining the CCSS

One of the misperceptions of the CCSS often voiced by their critics is that they represent a national curriculum imposed by the federal government onto states. The CCSS were developed by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council

of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), not the federal government; for a description of the development process, go to the CCSS Development Process web page (tinyurl.com/lged58f). Contrary to the belief that the CCSS would result in a single, national curriculum, a national survey of districts found that in 80% of districts, the curriculum materials for implementing the CCSS were being developed by teachers or the districts, with 65% of ELA teachers developing their own curriculum (Rentner & Kober, 2014). Only 35% of districts were using ELA curriculum or texts developed by for-profit/publishing companies—curriculum or texts that would apply across different states. The CCSS therefore do not mandate or impose curriculum; development of that curriculum is left up to teachers such as yourself. This means that the success of implementing the CCSS depends on your ability to generate engaging activities designed to address the standards.

We therefore invite you as a reader to think critically about the standards themselves, and about how they are implemented. For example, the CCSS reading and writing standards can readily lend themselves to adopting a formalist approach that emphasizes teaching the structures of narrative, argumentative, informational, and explanatory texts—an approach that can foster an overemphasis on teaching students to conform to specific forms as templates and a loss of attention to reading and writing based on social meanings and cultural contexts. We know that it matters to students not only what forms arguments and stories take, but also what arguments and stories are about and how they are relevant in the world and in their own lives.

It is also the case that you may be asked to adopt mandated prepackaged curriculum with little relevance to your particular students. In describing the challenges of adopting her own critical inquiry curriculum, Laura Darolia (2015, p. 12) describes having to work with:

> three versions of curricula: *mandated* curriculum is imposed by the district office; *paper* curriculum is the script or guide that accompanies curricular resources; and *real* curriculum includes the interests, questions, and passions of students (as cited by Vasquez, 2003, p. 19). In this setting, the mandated and paper curricula dominated, making it quite challenging to create the space to invite the real curriculum into our classroom.

The paper curriculum is evident in many textbooks purporting to be aligned with the CCSS. Some of these textbooks have followed advice from the authors of the CCSS to focus on textual meaning as singular and residing "within" the text. This advice suggests that teachers should employ "text-dependent questions" that bracket out students' use of their own prior knowledge and experiences in reading texts (Coleman & Pimental, 2012); it is contrary to reader-response theory and research positing that the meaning of texts evolves in an ongoing transaction between readers and texts (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1976, 1983).

We also have questions about the ideological assumptions, public attitudes, corporate interests, and political pressures that led to the creation and rapid adoption of the standards; the emphasis on standardized testing; the measurement of teachers by student scores on such tests; and the fact that the assessments designed for determining students' learning based on the CCSS have largely been developed and scored by large testing corporations. Analysis of first-year English teachers having to conform to a standards-based curriculum in Australia found that they resisted the imposition of top-down, external mandates based on their own, unique knowledge of English and their students, suggesting the importance of pedagogical content knowledge" (Shulman, 1986) acquired through unique social interactions with students and colleagues in schools as opposed to the "knowledge" embedded in standards documents that "deny the ways that teachers participate in the construction of their own and others' knowledge, positioning them instead as technicians who replicate existing knowledge" (Allard & Boecke, 2014, p. 51).

Our critical approach to the CCSS and our recognition of their limitations does not mean that we think that the CCSS can or should be tossed out the window. The CCSS are here to stay despite current political opposition. It is therefore important that you understand their strengths and weaknesses so that you can teach in ways that allow your students to both meet and exceed the CCSS.

With the help of Steffany, a Michigan ELA teacher, we use this first chapter to flesh out what critical inquiry means, where this approach comes from, and how you can make critical inquiry central to language arts teaching. We will set forward a description of critical inquiry based on students developing three important abilities.

Our Critical Inquiry Approach

At the most basic level a critical inquiry approach allows students to use academic skills and thinking to go beyond traditional notions of English language arts to examine larger aspects of human, interpersonal, and lived-world questions shaping reading, writing, speaking/listening, media/digital literacy, and language use. This approach focuses particularly on addressing problems and issues associated with well-being, fairness, and democracy.

As the CCSS recognize, English language arts has always concerned itself with students being able to read carefully and write persuasively. At the same time, English studies also put at the center valuing student perspectives; understanding the experience of others through literature and cultural study; and fostering kindness, thoughtfulness, and justice.

Critical inquiry draws on many traditions. Among them is *critical pedagogy*, an educational philosophy and movement, guided by passion and principle, and committed to helping students develop awareness and consciousness of freedom and inequality. Critical pedagogy challenges dominant myths and received thinking, critically considers ideology, and take steps toward creating a better world (Apple, 2012; Freire, 1968; Giroux, 2011; hooks, 1994).

A related tradition is *critical literacy*, which encourages students to pose questions about multiple meanings and differing perspectives, underlying message and theories, and ways in which reading and writing serve different audiences and interests (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2014). Critical literacy attempts to make connections between current and past events in the world and students' lives, where the world can be as small as the classroom or as large as the international stage (Janks, 2013). It also supports students' attempts foster changes in the status quo and to address problems or issues in ways that enhance their sense of agency.

Another tradition is *cultural studies*, which considers not only traditional "canonical" culture but also literary and informational texts, popular culture, film, the Internet, advertising, public discourse, and everyday practices (Carey-Webb, 2001; Hammer, & Kellner, 2009; Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2006).

Drawing on these traditions and on the work of many scholars who have written about inquiry-based English teaching (Beach & Myers, 2001), in this book we think of critical inquiry as drawing on three basic, interrelated components of a crvitical inquiry framework (illustrated in Figure 1.1).

Adopting a Critical Stance by Asking Questions to Identify Problems or Issues

Critical inquiry calls for a question-based approach to teaching that fosters engaged learning, rich understandings of self and others, and an empowered sense of citizenship. Paulo Freire is often identified as the founder of critical pedagogy underlying a critical inquiry approach. In his best-known book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968, p. 34), he argued:

> Education either functions as an instrument that is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it

Components of a Critical Inquiry Framework	*Processes*
Adopting a critical stance to identify problems and issues	• Noting problems/issues described in texts and lived-world experiences • Formulating reasons for problems and issues
Adopting alternative perspectives	• Applying institutional, historical, cultural, and autobiographical perspectives • Applying literary critical perspectives
Transforming thinking to engage in making change	• Adopting new "inner" ways of thinking and acting • Engaging in "outer" actions to make change

Figure 1.1 Components of a Critical Inquiry Framework

> becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

Freire advocated an approach to learning that he calls "problem posing" that emphasizes "acts of cognition, not transferals of information" (p. 67). Freire believed that "The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself [or herself] taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach" (p. 67), and that, "in problem-posing education, men [and women] develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as one in process, in transformation" (p. 71).

It is important to recognize that, given their continuous exposure to online news information on their mobile devices, adolescents are aware of problems and issues. A survey of 1,000 US and British females ages 13–20 (along with interviews with 25 participants) regarding perceptions of worlds, found that these adolescents expressed high levels of anxiety about terrorism, climate change, and their economic futures; distrust of corporations and governments; and concern about economic inequality and gender/racial equality (Hertz, 2015).

Engaging students in critical inquiry involves posing questions based on their concerns, interests, and passions about issues in texts and in their lived worlds (Rothstein & Santana, 2011). Rather than posing questions that simply encourage your students to find particular kinds of information, critical inquiry requires that students pose their own questions that shape the content and process of their learning. As Thomas and Brown (2011, pp. 81–82) note,

> Our educational system is built upon a structure that poses questions to find answers . . . Yet finding answers and memorizing facts do little to inspire students' passion to learn. . . . We propose reversing the order of things. What if, for example, questions were more important than answers? . . . What if students were asking questions about things that really mattered to them? . . . Every answer serves as a starting point, not an end point. It invites us to ask more and better questions.

Posing such questions presupposes that students have a genuine need to engage in inquiry about a problem or issue—that they do not already have answers to those questions, so that they need to engage in inquiry. Students are more likely to generate effective questions by formulating questions in small face-to-face or online groups that allow for revising/clarifying, followed by the opportunity to prioritize those questions in terms of what the class as a whole wants to address (Virgin,

2015). For resources on having students pose questions, visit the Right Question Institute website (rightquestion.org/education).

In responding to texts, students move from inferring a text's meaning to applying different perspectives to then challenging the text. Troy Hicks (2013) cites Ernest Morrell's description of four stances involved in critically responding to texts.

- Reading upon text: attempting to understand the context of the piece, who the author is, and with what authority he/she has to speak about the topic.
- Reading within text: following the logic of the argument and the evidence that the author uses to make claims. In other words, does the logic hold up given the evidence that has been presented and the claims being made?
- Reading beyond text: extending the text by asking questions and comparing to what others have said. Do the claims made hold up in the broader ways that the topic is discussed? Do they make sense in the field of study?
- Reading against text: pushing against the text by asking questions and contrasting it to what others have said. Do you agree or disagree with the claims that the author is making? Why? Are there critiques you can (and should) make? This will likely require multiple readings!

Posing Questions in Steffany's Class

These stances reflect the importance of students posing questions to analyze claims from both within and beyond the text. Let's return to Steffany and her critical inquiry teaching of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960). In her class Steffany drew on cultural studies approaches to support students developing questions about the historical context shaping the threatened lynching of an African American character, Tom Robinson, and a scene where he is saved from a mob by the protagonist, Scout, and her father Atticus. Steffany wanted to make this crucial event meaningful to her students by showing them a documentary film, related literary works, and postcard images.

> I showed them a clip from the video *Eyes on the Prize* that told the story of Emmett Till. Till, a 14-year-old Black boy from Chicago, went to visit family in Mississippi in 1955 and was brutally beaten and lynched for either whistling or saying, "Bye, baby," to a white woman (accounts differ). That night the woman's husband and another man took Till from his uncle's home, beat him, gouged out his eye, shot him, tied a cotton gin fan to his neck, and threw him into a river. His body was found days later and taken back to his mother.
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> When the video showed Emmett's body in the open casket, several of my students had to look away. We discussed how this event contributed to the Civil Rights Movement. After we viewed the video, I read aloud *A Wreath for Emmett Till*, a heroic crown sonnet written by Marilyn Nelson. To be honest, I was expecting several students to be bored by the end of the poem. It is lengthy, and it is poetry. Any English teacher knows what that can mean. However, as I looked around while I was reading, I was surprised to see that every student was paying—if not rapt—at least polite attention to me. After my reading, several of them expressed their amazement of the poetry and of Nelson's skill at including such difficult material in a poem.
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> I finished this topic by presenting the Without Sanctuary website (withoutsanctuary.org), a collection of nearly 80 postcards and photographs taken as souvenirs of lynchings and put together by collector James Allen. [See Figure 1.2 for an example of a lynching photograph.]

Figure 1.2 Lynching in Duluth, Minnesota, 1919

My students were appalled. When I told them that these were actual postcards sent in the mail, Stacy said, "How could anyone mail that to a relative and say, 'Look what I did this weekend!'?" Laney added, "I think I'll stick with my postcards of unicorns." Although she was making light of the situation, I could see that they were all deeply affected by the pictures. Tanya had looked away, disgusted, when they had come up on the screen, and many others had looks of horror on their faces.

Immediately afterward, I had them open their reader-response journals and free write on what they had just seen and heard. For several students, it was an eye-opening experience, as Jenna expressed: "Our world is so messed up! I don't know why God lets things like this happen." Many of them wrote of how it made them feel. Hope said, "Who could possibly have that much hatred in their heart, killing human beings like that! The video made me angry, terrified, and heartbroken. . . . I felt sick to my stomach with anger, horror, and sadness." Some even identified with the people who had committed these crimes simply because they were also white Americans. Jamie wrote: "It just makes me sick to my stomach thinking about what they did. I mean what possessed *us* to think these things [emphasis mine]. God didn't make us to be killers."

(Steffany Maher essay)

In Steffany's classroom, students' emotions of shock and anger in response to the photos of lynching led them to adopt a "How come?" inquiry stance, leading them to question how such a

practice could occur or be tolerated. As Steffany recognized, if students learn about the frequency and violence of lynching, it conflicts with their prior sense of the importance of justice for all. Steffany reports that students' informed critical stance improved their reading of the novel:

> Because we had taken the time during class to look at what had happened to people in history, they better understood the gravity of the situation as they read about what could have happened to Tom Robinson in the novel. Dan wrote, "Atticus was in great danger when he decided to protect Tom Robinson from the mob, and Scout and Jem also put themselves in danger when they ran to Atticus. If Scout hadn't spoken to Mr. Cunningham there might have been some killings that night." He also recognized the nature of a mob: "When a mob comes together, they are angry about one thing, and everything else is forgotten."
>
> (Steffany Maher essay)

The "How come?" stance Steffany's students assumed served to motivate them to further investigate lynching, Jim Crow, and ongoing discrimination in the criminal justice system that extends beyond the novel into the present time, associated with police mistreatment of African American males and "Black Lives Matter" protests.

In a critical inquiry approach, posing questions is not only a crucial part of close and careful reading, but it also invites students into the curriculum making process. Students can collaboratively construct questions about a topic or issue by listing questions in groups or as a class. They can then sort the questions into categories or prioritize those questions they perceive to be the most significant or relevant to addressing their concerns, interests, and passions.

In a critical inquiry classroom, based on their questions, students identify the nature of the problem or issue that they are addressing in relatively specific terms, thus guiding their search for information and knowledge. For example, rather than pose the question, "Why was lynching prevalent in the first half of the 20th century in the American South?" students might ask the more specific question, "What specific groups of Whites in the American South were engaged in lynching and what reasons did these groups articulate for engaging in lynching?" From specific questions like this one, students then generate related questions about current issues, for instance, "How does the criminal justice system treat different racial groups in our country today?"

While Steffany's approach is instructive, there are as many ways to engage in critical inquiry as there are teachers and classrooms. Central to a critical inquiry approach is the possibility for students to identify problems or issues in their own lives, portrayed in their fiction or nonfiction reading, in their communities, or in the broader world. Critical inquiry can focus on significant problems or issues facing society such as economic inequality, racism, climate change, health care, and immigration. At the same time, English teachers should recognize that for students certain problems or issues that seem relatively insignificant or personal to an adult can actually be major issues in their lives—for example, the fact that they are experiencing high levels of stress given the college admissions process. It is therefore useful to have students draw on their own experiences and knowledge to identify problems or issues rather than on prepackaged, "safe" issues typically found in curriculum or writing textbooks. For more on critical inquiry and engagement, see "Critical Inquiry Methods" on our website (englishccss.pbworks.com).

Adopting a "Critical Engagement" Stance

As we have seen, adopting a critical stance can be triggered by an emotional response, for example, the emotion of anger. Students might draw on emotions of empathy, concern, confusion, doubt, puzzlement, frustration, outrage, etc., to pose "How come?" or "Why is it the case that. . .? as a

starting point for deeper investigation and a means of "disrupting the commonplace" (Lewison et al., 2014, p. 7). Recognizing how these emotions trigger perceptions of problems or issues is important to a *critical engagement* approach (Lewis & Tierney, 2012). In that approach, students attend to how certain emotions trigger adoption of a critical stance that involves both "critical distance *and* immersion, a process both analytic and playful, resistant and emotional" (Wohlwend & Lewis, 2011, p. 189).

For example, in teaching the Disney film *Pocahontas* in a high school English class, a teacher wanted her students to critique the stereotyped representations of Native Americans (Lewis & Tierney, 2013). Two African American students in the class voiced strong responses to the hyper-sexualization of Pocahontas, a critique that reflected their prior knowledge of stereotypes of African Americans and drove their adoption of a critical stance. Or, in responding to the memoir *The Things They Carried* (O'Brien, 2009), portraying Tim O'Brien's experience with the Vietnam War, students may express questions about why many of O'Brien's family and small-town community members supported the war, leading to the perception that going to fight was his "patriotic duty."

These "indeterminate situations" create doubts about the way situations are associated with certain contradictions, fostering questions about the present and considerations of alternative solutions (McCann, 2014). For example, students may be curious as to why when a school administrator promotes the need for "healthy eating," that the same administrator continues to allow soda machines providing high-sugar drinks. Identifying this contradiction leads to their entertaining doubts about this practice. After investigating reasons for continuing to have soda machines in the school, the students may discover that the companies making the beverages provide donations to the school, which is facing budget cuts due to the failure of a school referendum increasing property taxes. Students might then recognize that the issue involved more than just the beverage companies making donations to the school; the issue also involved their community's lack of support for funding education. Identifying contradictions associated with how institutions operate therefore triggers students' need to engage in critical inquiry.

This example opens up a variety of real-world research and persuasive writing possibilities. The students' critical stance creates relevant and meaningful opportunities to research information and alternative perspectives, to make and evaluate arguments, to propose solutions and to ask more questions.

Critical inquiry is therefore an unfolding and recursive process driven by posing further questions that lead to identifying a range of different reasons or factors associated with a problem or issue. Such investigation often begins with identifying problems or issues raised in reading or viewing that then leads to a recognition of how larger institutional, historical, or cultural systems shape the problem or issue—as is the case with how the system of using local property taxes to fund education shaped the issue of soda machines in the school, or the connection between discipline policies and the "school-to-prison" pipeline. Students may therefore begin with one focus for their inquiry, but through posing questions and engaging in further investigations, may end up with a quite different focus.

Consider Alternative Perspectives: Reading Carefully; Researching and Using Information; and Considering Alternative Historical, Institutional, and Cultural Perspectives

As students develop their own questions and engage in a critical inquiry approach, they will need to read, study, and research—perhaps from a range of literary, cultural, and informational texts—as they gather and share knowledge, refine their thinking and consider alternative perspectives.

Students' adoption of alternative perspectives on a problem or issue can be shaped by their attitudes/involvement with a problem or issue influenced by their exposure, or lack thereof, to a range of ideas and perspectives. A Pew Research Center analysis of use of different media outlets by Americans who identified as conservative versus liberal indicated that the two groups accessed different media outlets that serve to support/reinforce their political attitudes or beliefs, with little or no access to outlets that were inconsistent with their attitudes or beliefs (Doherty & Weisel, 2014). Conservatives acquired news from Fox News or conservative radio talk shows while liberals acquired news from *The New York Times*, National Public Radio, or PBS. If students encounter only beliefs and attitudes that reinforce their existing ideas, they are less likely to engage in critical inquiry. Students discovering, researching, and carefully considering alternative perspectives is an important dimension of a critical inquiry classroom.

Steffany's students, wrestling with the violence of lynching, increasingly asked questions about the whole legal system. Steffany supported them as they researched the experience of the court system in the South prior to and during the Civil Rights era. In a critical inquiry approach, once students formulate questions to guide their research, they then need to acquire and share information and knowledge from texts, research, or everyday experiences to address these questions.

To acquire relevant sources of information, you can provide students with a range of online, library, and scholarly sources including Google Scholar and other academic databases. In accessing information, students need to identify the source or sponsor, the quality of documentation and evidence, peer and professional reviews, and the range and degree of alternative perspectives.

To help her students examine how the legal system operated during the Civil Rights movement, Steffany returned to the story of Emmett Till. Her students researched the trial that ensued after his death, the acquittal of the murderers by an all-White jury and their subsequent confessions. They extended their research by reading about the "Mississippi Burning" case, a trial of the alleged murderers of three Civil Rights activists.

This research and information was new to Steffany's students and provided them with relevant insight into the experience of African Americans in the legal system. The information they were researching called for Steffany's mostly White students to consider alternative historical, institutional, and cultural perspectives. As Steffany reported,

> A study of our nation's system of trial by a jury of our peers and how it functioned during this time period ensued. From our discussions, I could see that their sense of justice was bruised. Students expressed their anger at the white male jurors who knew what was right and yet ruled otherwise. Research and discussion transitioned into a discussion of the court scene in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. I told them that I was going to allow them to lead the discussion and that I would offer comments only in the last few minutes. Because the students had already written in their journals and discussed in small groups their thoughts on the assigned reading, each one had something to contribute to the discussion. Students brought up Tom's obvious innocence, Mayella's motivation, Bob Ewell's despicable character, and Jem's response to the verdict. Without needing to call on him as I have always had to do in the past, Jesse added: "I thought it was important—Scout's reaction to the verdict—because she said all these people were people she'd grown up with and trusted, and then they just convicted someone who was—obviously—innocent."
>
> (Steffany Maher essay)

The critical stance that Steffany's students adopted, their historical research, and their increased understanding of differing perspectives sharpened their understanding and gave them new, and transportable, insights. As illustrated by Jesse's comment, Steffany's students were also able to read

more carefully; Jesse was able to see the perspective shift that Harper Lee dramatizes as Scout gains a whole new way to understand—and question—the community that she was brought up in.

Reading carefully is often called "close reading." As we describe in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5 on the CCSS reading standards, there has been considerable debate about the different meanings of the concept of close reading. Some accounts assume that students should just focus on the text itself—as if the meaning of a text resides solely "within" a text (Coleman & Pimental, 2012)—while other accounts recognize the need for students to apply their prior knowledge, experiences, attitudes, and purposes for reading (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2012; Lehman & Roberts, 2013). In this book we adopt the stance that close reading entails both close analysis of the use of language, images, video, or audio in a text and application of prior knowledge, contexts, experiences, attitudes, and purposes. As Aukerman (2012, p. 42) notes:

> As I see it, a reader who reads critically must read with a sense of textual authority and must recognize that (a) her or his own reading of a text is one of many possible understandings (the multiplicity of perspectives); (b) the readings we produce depend on our histories and social locations (the contingency of interpretation); and (c) writing/reading text is never a neutral act (the ideological nature of texts/readings). Thus, to teach critical literacy is to invite students to inhabit positions of textual authority in which their work with texts is anchored in these recognitions.

Fostering an Openness to Alternative Perspectives

Perspective taking is one of the most challenging parts of critical inquiry. Students may be reluctant to interrogate their own familiar, secure beliefs and attitudes or hesitant to explore alternative beliefs and attitudes. To acknowledge how we as authors value sharing alternative perspectives, we include comments from students in Professor Tom Lynch's methods course at Pace University and Allen Webb's methods course at Western Michigan University who responded to a draft of this book in spring 2015, comments that reflect a range of perspectives on topics in this book.

CRITICAL INQUIRY QUESTION ABOUT TEACHING TO EXCEED

I wonder if students familiar with traditional pedagogy of right and wrong answers would be less likely to take up critical inquiry. Steffany's (mostly White) students continued to look to her for information and facts. But I wonder if it there would not be a different response from students who were more familiar with oppression and discrimination. Wouldn't students from an oppressed background be more desirous to question the status quo?

Pace University student Will Kroese

In classroom discussions, it often happens that students seek consensus on problems or issues they are addressing. However, analysis of high school students' discussions related to argumentative writing found that when students did achieve consensus, they often did not explore the problem or issue in sufficient depth, largely because they shared the same or similar perspectives on the problem or issue (Ryu & Bloome, 2014). Without exposure to dissenting, alternative perspectives, students simply all readily agree on how to think about a certain problem or issue.

When students did not achieve consensus because they were applying different, alternative perspectives and challenging each other's perspective, they were more likely to engage in a richer and more complex discussion. Disagreements with each other can lead students to recognize and critically examine their assumptions. Teachers can help foster an open-minded community where students acknowledge, work through, and benefit from others' perspectives.

It is often easier to look for one definitive explanation than it is to understand complexities. For example, it is easier to understand a person or character's lack of success as due to "laziness" than it is to understand it as related to a host of complex, competing factors. As Sheridan Blau (2003) notes, "readers who read texts looking for secure and certain answers to their questions may also read the world with a similar passion for certainty and with a similar intolerance for the moral complexity and ambiguity that resists simplistic formulations" (p. 213).

Literature, videos, speakers, informational texts from diverse perspectives—including multicultural, women's, world, young adult, postcolonial, working class, and different religious backgrounds—provide students with alternative perspectives that serve to challenge their own status quo perspectives. To expose her students to these alternative perspectives, Molly Vasich, an English teacher at Washburn High School in Minneapolis, continually emphasizes the value of ongoing conversations in her classroom:

> I think that it's important that they have conversations about where they are coming from and what they connect with and what they don't because often we just have a whole bunch of white noise in our heads and we don't know what we believe or what it is that we actually know. So before I jump in and try to bring in either another speaker who's an expert on the topic or try to say something about it myself, I try to get the students to get their heads spinning to think about what they know about things like feminism, dictatorship, women's rights, and reproductive justice. They then have a better understanding once we have that conversation and then bring in another perspective and have them talk about it. It's interesting because I don't think students think about the diversity of opinions in the classroom, so it's important to get those opinions out. I think the English class is a great place to do it because when you have a text it is easier to do that than when it's something personal. One of the conversations we had earlier this year was about Hemingway's "Up in Michigan," which is a short story—it was in a series of about ten stories. At the end of it, there's a kind of ambiguous possibility that there was some kind of, could be an acquaintance rape, but that's ambiguous. And that's a really hot issue now in terms of how to deal with rape on campus, and so it was interesting to have that conversation because it was a safe space to do it because was in the context of these two characters that the students' don't know instead of being about a situation with someone the students do know so it made it a little bit of a safer space for multiple opinions.
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> And then after hearing those opinions, I process that and determine what resources I need to bring in to broaden the conversation. Those resources are everywhere; for example, I just found an article in *The New York Times* yesterday in the Magazine about what college campuses are doing in terms of education, so bring in those things to have students have conversations about it.
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> For some issues it's hard because I don't want that one voice who thinks differently be shut down. By starting to talk about a book or a text it encourages a safe space and then students know how to talk about something that's hard to talk about and not interrupt each other when they want to push back on something.
>
> (Interview with Molly Vasich)

Adopting Historical, Institutional, and Cultural Perspectives

In implementing the CCSS, it's important to recognize that the CCSS also include social studies and science standards, suggesting the value of cross-disciplinary curriculum integration with social studies and science classes. While there are a range of different perspectives students adopt in responding to and creating texts, three are consistent with integration with the CCSS social studies standards: historical, institutional, and cultural perspectives.

Historical Perspectives

Considering problems or issues from an historical perspective entails interpreting how that text or event was shaped by historical contexts or forces, a perspective consistent with reading informational texts about a certain historical event or period. Doing so serves to address the ELA CCSS history/social studies standards, for example, Standard 7 for grades 11–12: "Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem" (Common Core Standards, 2010, p. 61).

Other ways to tap into historical perspectives include asking students to interview their parents or grandparents or members of an older generation about their autobiographical recollections of living in previous decades. Students could ask parents or grandparents to contrast their past and present lives—for example, their experiences as daughters/sons during their childhoods and their current experiences as parents or grandparents.

Institutional Perspectives

Students can also examine how problems or issues are shaped by certain forces operating in different institutional systems: families, schooling, government/political, legal, health care, business, science, community/neighborhood, environmental/ecological, communications/media, military, etc. Each of these systems is driven by the need to achieve certain goals or objects through use of certain tools (Engestrom, 2009). The legal system attempts to support compliance to laws through use of trials or mediation; the health-care system addresses people's health issues through medical care; and the military system aims to protect a country's citizens through weapons.

Students are often not aware of how various institutions and systems serve as invisible forces that structure and inform their own roles and beliefs. Helping students gain an awareness of institutional forces can provide them with a useful lens for understanding how institutions work both in lived and textual worlds. For example, students could study how the military operates as a system defined by hierarchical rules and roles related to interpreting military characters' traits, beliefs, and goals in novels about the military, for example, *Catch-22* (Heller, 1961). In responding to *Catch-22*, students can then apply this knowledge to understanding how Heller is parodying the military as a system through his characters' actions and use of language.

Part of understanding institutions and systems involved knowing how particular discourses are valued and used within those systems. For example, the legal system, the business-management community, and various scientific communities each rely upon specific forms of language, systems of reasoning, sets of values, and ways of viewing the world, ways of knowing and thinking referred to as "discourses" (Gee, 2008). People construct their identities through adopting certain discourses as ways of knowing and thinking—what Gee (2008) refers to as "identity tool kits." As a teacher, you adopt certain ways of knowing and thinking associated with pedagogical theory and practice constituting your identity as a teacher.

Students can critique systems by identifying the goals and discourses that drive a system and by considering how those goals and discourses shape participants' actions and perceptions. For example, students might consider how certain legal or moral discourses shape Atticus's actions in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960). In doing so, they can examine how people or organizations can adopt or promote one-sided or biased perspectives in ways that misrepresent or exclude certain information. For example, the Bill of Rights Institute funded by the Koch brothers purports to provide teachers and students with information about the Bill of Rights particularly for use in social studies classes (Bigelow, 2014). Analysis of the curriculum content reflects a libertarian perspective on the importance of free enterprise to conduct business without government intervention, as reflected in a lesson stating that "The Founders considered industry and property rights critical to the happiness of society" along with example of negative government control in an activity, "Life Without the Bill of Rights?" in which "a cartoon character pops up with a dialogue bubble reading, 'The gov't took my home!' An illustration shows his home demolished" (Bigelow, 2014). However, what is excluded from this analysis is how the practice of individual property rights served to disenfranchise and oppress certain groups, as evident in slave owners such as Patrick Henry owning more than 70 slaves on his plantation. Similarly, the Koch brothers' funded Youth Entrepreneurs, a "high school free market and liberty-based course [designed to challenge] common economic fallacies," including:

> Rich get richer at the expense of the poor. . . . Government wealth transfer programs help the poor. . . . Private industry is incapable of doing functions that public sector has always done. . . . Unions protect employees. . . . Minimum wage, "living wage," laws are good for people/society. . . . Capitalist societies provide an environment for greed and materialism to flourish.
>
> (Bigelow, 2014)

In analyzing these texts, students can determine the underlying assumptions or warrants behind these claims that reflect certain ideological stances, in this case, a belief in free enterprise without government regulations. This includes inferring the discourses constituting ways of knowing and thinking shaping formulation of certain claims, in this case, an economic, free-market discourse as well as a libertarian political discourse often voiced by the Tea Party.

Inferring these assumptions or warrants leads students to then identify underlying agendas driving these texts related to what motivates people to adopt certain perspectives. In the case of the Koch brothers, given that a major focus of their corporation has to do with fossil fuels, they are concerned about potential government regulation of carbon dioxide emissions associated with addressing climate change, so they are seeking political support for policies that would limit or prevent such regulations (Dickinson, 2014).

It is also important for students to explore how arguments, claims, and solutions may be based in ideological differences, for example that conservatives frame issues in terms of problems related to what they see as government overreach into people's lives, while liberals frame issues more in terms of the need to support individuals and groups (Lakoff, 2002).

In examining how perspectives shape arguments, students also need to recognize how their own perspectives are shaping their analysis of others' perspectives. They are more likely to do so when they are exposed to perspectives differing from or even challenging their own views. In this way they can better understand their own thinking, and, as relevant, perceive the potential limitations of their perspectives. For more on institutional perspectives, see "Critiquing Institutions" on our website (englishccss.pbworks.com).

Cultural Perspectives

It is also useful to have students recognize the influence of cultural perspectives on their responses to and creation of texts. For example, in responding to literary texts portraying different cultural worlds, students need to apply relevant cultural perspectives to understand those worlds, for example, the world of the traditional Ibo in Nigeria, West Africa as depicted in *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1958) or corruption and oppression in modern Egypt in *War in the Land of Egypt* (al-Qa'id, 1986).

The lack of a focus on varied cultural perspectives shaping responses to literature in the CCSS led the state of New York to add a separate set of literary response standards addressing the need for students to adopt different cultural perspectives. In reading, these standards emphasize "employing knowledge of literary language, textual features, and forms to read and comprehend, reflect upon, and interpret literary texts from a variety of genres and a wide spectrum of American and world cultures" (New York State Department of Education, 2011, p. 16). The New York writing standards emphasize the need for students to "develop personal, cultural, textual, and thematic connections within and across genres as they respond to texts through written, digital, and oral presentations, employing a variety of media and genres" (New York State Department of Education, 2011, p. 25). We see these additions to the CCSS as useful for teachers in all states in avoiding a focus on dominant or limited forms of content and cultural literacy.

In addressing issues or problems from different perspectives, it's important that students acquire relevant sources of valid information about these issues or problems for use in providing supporting evidence for their claims. Doing so serves to limit or challenge their reliance solely on personal opinions as opposed to claims and counter-claims supported by evidence.

In a critical inquiry approach, you, as a teacher, assume an important role in raising alternative perspectives or bringing to consideration relevant and diverse resources, particularly when you perceive students adopting limited or one-sided perspectives. In one study, preservice teachers' perspectives on students adopted during and after their teacher education program shaped the degree to which they adopted a "social justice" approach in their initial year of teaching in an urban school (Whipp, 2013). Teachers who adopted a cultural and institutional perspective were more likely to employ culturally responsive, social justice pedagogies, while teachers who adopted a "color-blind" perspective focused more on students as individuals with less use of a social justice pedagogy.

A key factor in whether teachers adopted a social justice approach was whether they had cross-cultural experiences either before and during teacher preparation, experiences essential to employing "culturally responsive teaching" that draws on the range of students' cultural backgrounds in planning multicultural instruction (Grant & Sleeter, 2009). O'Byrne & Smith (2014) draw on Banks and Banks (2013, p.176) to identify five dimensions of effective multicultural education for their preservice teachers to address in their methods courses:

> *Content integration*: Content integration deals with the extent to which teachers use examples and content from a variety of cultures in their teaching. *Knowledge construction*: Teachers need to help students understand, investigate, and determine how the implicit cultural assumptions, frames of reference, perspectives, and biases within a discipline influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed. *Prejudice reduction*: This dimension focuses on the characteristics of students' racial attitudes and how they can be modified by teaching methods and materials. *Empowering school culture and social structure*: Grouping and labeling practices, sports participation, disproportionality in achievement, and the interaction of staff and students across ethnic and racial lines must be examined to create a school culture that empowers students from diverse racial, ethnic, and gender groups. *Equity pedagogy*: An equity pedagogy exists when teachers modify their teaching in ways that will facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, cultural, gender, and social class groups.

The teachers perceived addressing these different dimensions as requiring, as one teacher noted "having an understanding and appreciation of every student's background and culture" (p. 178) so that, as another teacher noted "everyone's individuality to be recognized and incorporated into his or her learning experience" (p. 178). Acquiring knowledge of students' cultures, as another teacher noted, involves having a "basic understanding of those cultures to determine how best to form a bonding relationship with each student" (p. 179).

This suggests the importance of acquiring alternative cultural perspectives through co-inquiry as a co-collaborator with students. In his teaching, Maha Bali (2014) notes that he tries to

> treat students as peers in a learning community. In my first day of class, I quote Jesse Stommel's online learning manifesto, "Content-expertise does not equal good teaching. . . . Once a course begins, the growing expertise of the students, and not the teacher, should be the primary focus." . . . Critical pedagogy, for me, is not about knowing how to do everything right, or getting it right the first time, or every time. It is about putting faith in our learners to take control of their learning, and teach us, each other, and themselves in the process.
>
> (p. 1)

CRITICAL INQUIRY QUESTION ABOUT TEACHING TO EXCEED

I think it's often difficult for teachers (myself included sometimes) to let go of some set script of what the students need to learn. Bali's emphasis on the teacher learning from and with her/his students is important in empowering the students and making what they learn relevant and self-realized.

Pace University student Joshua Alan Dick

Helping students reflect on the limitations of their own beliefs and perspectives is most likely to occur when students research alternative perspectives that challenge their thinking. In his courses, Heiman (2013) gives students puzzles or dilemmas that require alternative, unfamiliar perspectives. He challenges their assumption, for example, that English courses consist primarily of responding to or creating literary texts by noting how literacy includes and values the disciplinary literacies of social and even natural sciences.

Heiman also teaches rhetorical analysis of language use to show how assumptions and attitudes shape the framing of arguments, leading students to reflect on how their own assumptions and attitudes shape the texts they read and write. One of his students said, "Now, when looking at subjects and issues, I can look at both sides and can have a more accurate opinion on the matter rather than just going into an argument with my prior knowledge and just hearing what I want to hear" (p. 126).

Developing your students' skill at taking different perspectives means that instruction cannot be standardized, teaching in the same way in all contexts. Instead, you need to ground perspective-taking in the unique aspects of your students' own experiences, identities, and community contexts (Beach, Johnston, & Haertling-Thein, 2015). Understanding the complexity of multiple, alternative, and contrasting perspectives is one of the most interesting, meaningful, and enjoyable aspects of teaching English.

Transform Thinking and Identities through Responding to and Writing Texts to Imagine, Propose and/or Enact Humane Solutions.

Adopting a critical inquiry approach also ideally leads to change in students' thinking, attitudes, and identities as they become agents of change and possibility. Any consideration of taking action involves both a focus on the momentary "outer life" of action—for example, staging a protest—and the "inner life" of action associated with long-term changes in one's consciousness and emotions driving the need for action (Rogers & Labadie, 2015). The "inner life" of thoughts and emotions contributes to developing an awareness of the need for "outer life" action underlying critical inquiry as action. As portrayed in the movie *Selma* (DuVernay, 2014), about the voting-rights protest march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama led by Martin Luther King, Jr., the organizers of that march were continually grappling with their "inner life" emotions of anger, doubt, anxiety, ambiguity, etc., associated with how and why to engage in the "outer life" physical march. As Rogers and Labadie (2015, p. 25) note:

> This awareness, or act of knowing, becomes linked with a way of being, or a stance. Thus, a stance is created through a continual chain of naming-acting-reflecting on the world. The accumulation of actions, thoughts and reflections which create a stance is comprised of both the "inner" and "outer" life of social action.

It is also the case that the "outer life" of action may not necessarily result in any change, which was evident in the initial attempt to engage in the protest march that resulted in violence toward the marchers. However, given the strength of the "inner life" emotions evoked by the televising of the violence across the nation, the later successful march did ultimately result in changes in the voting laws that allowed African Americans to vote.

Through her writing about what she perceives to be the neoliberal control of schooling through excessive testing and teacher accountability that undermines student engagement, Stephanie Jones (2014, p. 216) notes that her writing involves

> the making and remaking of things: events, places, interactions, feelings, words, and relationships through writing is simultaneously a making and remaking of ourselves. We come to something new, we think somewhat different, we learn something about ourselves and that learning opens up a line of sight close to us just yesterday.

She perceives her writing as not only changing her own perceptions and identity, but also as something that changes the world:

> Not because it changes other people, but because it changes us, and we move through the world differently, speaking about the once impossible and living in the used-to-be-fiction. The way we perceive people, places, and events are forever changed and will likely change again with the assistance of remaking ourselves tending to bodies and writing. (p. 129)

Writing about change itself leads to reflection on how to cope with change. In writing about coping with the effects of brain surgery, Jefferson High student Ryan Fitch recognized the value of patience:

> The first few months were frustrating. I missed nearly an entire trimester of school, lost over 30 lbs, had trouble with losing consciousness, and was confined to my house by a doctor's

> order. Nothing seemed to be improving. It wasn't until I learned the value of patience before the side effects began to subside.
>
> Patience is one of the strongest characteristics a person can have. Discovering this turned over a new stone in my life. I found that when I told myself I couldn't do something, my mind turned it into a reality. I learned to convince myself that just because I couldn't accomplish something right now, didn't mean the same result would recur in the future.
>
> Aside from the incision on the back of my neck, most of the recovery has been mental. I had to adapt to a different lifestyle. Certain things no longer came to me as easily as they had before, but that didn't mean I was at a disadvantage. An opportunity was presented before me to strengthen my mind, to discover a new way to problem solve. This surgery gave me a lot of time to reflect. Time that otherwise, I thought I never had.
>
> (Ryan Fitch school essay)

To foster such similar transformations in students' thinking and attitudes, you need to create a safe classroom that accepts and encourages honest expression of student ideas and opinions. A critical inquiry approach demonstrates a commitment to addressing questions, problems, and issues raised and identified by students. As argued by Freire (1968), in some measure this requires a shift in power relationships between teachers and students so that students find that they do have a voice in shaping their learning and the world around them, and that they can entertain and recommend changes. As Robinson and Taylor (2007, p. 14) note:

> For pupil voice to be meaningful, schools need to be committed to wanting a democratic way of working. They need to move beyond a simple eliciting of students perspectives, to a real attempt to involve and engage students as active agents of change.

Students are more likely to be open to change in their thinking or attitude if they are open to entertaining alternative perspectives. For example, through responding to multicultural literature portraying cultural difference, White students may adopt a defensive stance towards portrayals of Whites in literature as privileged (Beach, Thein, & Parks, 2008), or they may minimize racial difference by positing that "people are all the same," failing to acknowledge the effects of institutional racism. In contrast, students may accept cultural difference in ways that lead to changes in their thinking and attitudes, which in turn, leads to changes in their actions.

Adopting a Critical Stance in Responding to Texts

Changing one's thinking or attitudes also requires adopting a critical stance in responding to claims in text, what has also been called "rhetorical reading" of how texts position readers to accept claims (Warren, 2013). In reading a letter to the editor that invites readers to accept a status-quo practice, students who disagree with this practice need to resist these invitations by formulating counter-claims to challenge claims in the letter.

In responding to literature (Rosenblatt, 1938, 1976, 1983), students transact with a text in a social context, in light of their experience, identities, and needs. This transaction serves to transform the text, making new meaning. As McLean and Rowsell (2015, p. 205) note:

> the process of creating the new meaning is a transformative one in that the new text that is produced is imbued with not only the original text but also the reader's identity and experiences. For Rosenblatt, the process of creating or authoring the new text is transactional, the result is transformative (i.e., reader is transformed into writer), and the text is produced.

Through this transaction, students are adopting the thinking and beliefs of characters themselves, coping with challenges and changes, and inferring patterns in actions to make sense of situations. For example, in responding to *Othello*, students could list claims formulated by Iago regarding Desdemona's presumed duplicitous actions implying that she has been an unfaithful wife (Hakes, 2009). They can then review these different claims to assess their credibility against claims formulated by other characters about Desdemona's actions, including those of Othello. In doing so they may then find a pattern in how Iago has been able to encourage Othello to believe that his wife has been unfaithful. Students are therefore assessing the validity of Iago's reasons as to Desdemona's behavior. Once students have a list of these reasons they can then back, and based on evidence from the play, determine their validity.

Heiman (2013) posits the need for students to experience critical analysis not simply as a detached, impersonal process but as part of being "transformative critical thinkers" (p. 117). Transforming how students think about problems or issues involves helping students recognize how their own beliefs, biases, assumptions, and values shape the ways that they frame problems or issues. For example, in addressing a problem in their community, a student may identify the problem, causes of and perspectives on the problem, and possible solutions:

> transformative critical thinkers seek to understand how they came to those conclusions and why they believe as they do by taking inventory of their values and beliefs. Reflecting upon the source of one's notion of right and wrong, for instance, may reveal to the individual an assumption that has led to limited thinking on some facet of the issue in question. Entertaining other notions of right or wrong . . . invites the thinker to entertain a conclusion that differs from one he would normally pursue. . . . The end result, it is hoped, is increased understanding on all sides of an issue. (p. 118)

Students examining *Othello* or *Taming of the Shrew* might consider connections or disconnections with contemporary issues of domestic violence. Through research they could learn about the mindset of abusers who are jealous, controlling, selecting victims from family and friends, and/or hold rigid views of gender roles; and the mindset of victims who are dependent, fearful, and/or see themselves as responsible for the abuse. These connections can invite students to imagine, propose, or enact humane solutions, both in their discussions of historical literary works and in response to their inquiry into contemporary problems or issues.

Steffany talks about exploring her students' questions, developing their critical stance with increased historical knowledge and new perspectives, and preparing them for a move from awareness to advocacy. Her students coupled their reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960) and historical investigation of lynching with Walter Dean Myers's (1999) young adult novel *Monster*, which explores the incarceration of a young African American man on trial for the murder of a store owner. Steffany points out that when students investigate contemporary American incarceration rates based on race they learn about disturbing racial discrimination still going on today. In this sense reading a literary work from the past is connected by critical inquiry to injustices in the present, and the study of history becomes a way to understand the world today as "a history of the present" (Foucault, 1977).

The critical inquiry Steffany's students engaged in prepared them to better analyze arguments, make claims, and propose solutions. They could analyze and take stands on a variety of topics, including the importance of the attempted lynching and trial scene in the novel, impact of lynching on African Americans, the fairness of the jury system in the Jim Crow era, ongoing inequities in the criminal justice system, and the school-to-prison pipeline. Her students' critical stance, and their engagement with information and ideas, prepared them for both formal argumentation and

for creative attempts at persuasion. (One student presented an argument through the format of a poem set to music and images.) Steffany says:

> I am convinced that all my students' well-prepared presentations were a result of them connecting personally to these issues . . . students were better able to relate the literature and these important issues to their own lives. They were thinking more deeply about the world around them and their places in it. They were also interested enough in the literature and involved enough in the class to contribute their responses to what they had read and learned. As a result, my classroom was a much more exciting place for me to be as well.
>
> (Steffany Maher essay)

While Steffany's teaching of *To Kill a Mockingbird* is compelling, many works commonly taught in English can become starting points for critical inquiry into the past and present. There are any number of possibilities. English teachers frequently examine the portrayal of witch hunts in Miller's play *The Crucible* (2003) to help students inquire into how Puritan religious beliefs led townspeople to believe that their peers were agents of the devil, a parallel to the 1950s and 1960s as shaped by McCarthyism and anti-Communism, or the present-day treatment of government and corporate whistleblowers. In studying *The Kite Runner* (Hosseini, 2004), students might ask questions about the cultural world of Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion as shaped by fundamentalist Muslim beliefs associated with the Taliban control of the country and ongoing issues in the region. Students reading *Things Fall Apart* (Achebe, 1958) might inquire into colonialism and its ongoing impacts not only in Nigeria or West Africa, but also in other places in the world, including in their own communities in North America.

Acquiring relevant knowledge also involves making connections between texts and/or events. Examining these connections leads students to infer consistent *patterns* across texts in terms of how phenomena are represented. For example, in analyzing a series of television ads by oil and coal companies touting their contributions to economic growth and employment, students may pose questions as to "What's missing?" in these ads related to the environmental effects of fossil fuel emissions.

One example of students engaging in actions associated with critical inquiry occurred in two high schools in Jefferson County, Colorado, where students were upset about their school board's plan to review the new advanced placement US history standards and curriculum, which the school board perceived as adopting a revisionist version of history critical of how the early American colonists treated the Native Americans (Gewertz, 2014). The board committee was reviewing curriculum material based on whether it would "'promote citizenship, patriotism, benefits of the free-market system, respect for authority'. . . [for] students to learn more about the 'positive aspects of the United States and its heritage'" (Gewertz, 2014, p. 1).

Students then engaged in protests involving walking out of their schools. One student noted that "I don't think my education should be censored. . . . We should be able to know what happened in our past," while another student indicated the need for adopting a critical perspective on events in American history:

> As we grow up, you always hear that America's the greatest, the land of the free and the home of the brave. . . . For all the good things we've done, we've done some terrible things. It's important to learn about those things, or we're doomed to repeat the past.
>
> (Gewertz, 2014, p. 1)

Of course, questions of curriculum and censorship are often valuable areas for critical inquiry in English language arts.

The investigation of how things could be different or better and the creative imagination of a more humane world are essential to a critical inquiry approach. Through critical inquiry students are motivated to learn, grow, and change. As students imagine, propose, and/or enact humane solutions they are, in fact, both more deeply understanding *and* critical in the present. As they inquire into what is and what ought to be, they learn how to improve our world—and they are undertaking necessary steps not only toward career and college success, but also toward democratic citizenship, thus fulfilling the very purposes of education.

Potential Challenges in Adopting a Critical Inquiry Approach

As we close this chapter, we want to acknowledge that adopting a critical inquiry approach can be challenging given students' and the public's misconceptions of critical inquiry (Brookfield, 2011). Students and members of the public sometimes assume that adopting a critical stance:

- Entails adopting only a *negative* stance—that claims or representations are only perceived to be problematic or wrong. However, assessing the validity of certain claims involves identifying both the strengths and limitations of various claims or representations.
- Presupposes a relativist perspective that there are no shared, common beliefs—that "everything is relative," leading to a sense of disconnection with or lack of commitment to establishing a sense of truth. However, adopting a critical stance actually requires a connection with or commitment to certain truths bolstering one's critique.
- Reflects a left-of-center political or ideological orientation, a stance evident in conservative groups' opposition to the CCSS as attempting to impose certain ideological perspectives onto students. However, adopting a critical inquiry approach entails critique of any and all ideologies.
- Involves only cognitive, analytical processes that avoid imposing personal beliefs or subjective perspectives. However, adopting a critical inquiry approach involves drawing on one's emotional responses to perceptions of issues or problems.
- Focuses primarily on "taking action" through "outer" physical activities (Rogers & Labadie, 2015) such as staging protests. However, "inner" transformation of students' beliefs and attitudes resulting from critical inquiry may be just as significant even without an "outer" display of action, particularly given the fact that students often lack the power to make changes in their institutions.

We certainly recognize that as a beginning or even seasoned teacher you may be reluctant to adopt a critical inquiry approach that entails challenging status quo beliefs and norms operating in your school or community. Such an approach may feel risky given potential resistance by administrators, parents, or your students. However, we urge you to carefully consider whether the resistance you imagine matches the actual stances of those you work with as a teacher. We also urge you to consider the extent to which your own assumptions about the stances of others might perpetuate status quo reluctance to a critical inquiry approach.

Consider the following study as food for thought. Thein (2013) found that practicing teachers in an online course on multicultural literature instruction consistently suggested that they supported the rights and needs of LGBT families and students, yet at the same time insisted that they could not teach LGBT texts or issues in their own classrooms. These teachers justified their belief in the impossibility of teaching LGBT issues through common narratives or storylines about resistance that were grounded in status quo assumptions about parents, teachers, and students. In urging teachers to question these assumptions, Thein explained:

> The goal of this study was not to disparage language arts teachers or to accuse them of homophobia or heterosexism. Instead, the goal was to shed light on discourses and rhetorical arguments that are less than productive for moving language arts pedagogy forward. (p. 177)

Similarly, we encourage you to continue to move your own pedagogy forward by engaging in forward-thinking conversations with students, parents, and administrators in which you assume that others may in fact share your interest in exceeding the CCSS by developing instruction that critically engages students in issues that matter to them and to our world. You may find that your own carefully considered stances are more persuasive than you might imagine.

Adopting a critical inquiry approach is most likely to occur when you yourself are willing to engage in ongoing critical inquiry about your role and purpose as a teacher. As John Dewey (1904, p. 15) noted:

> The teacher who leaves the professional school with power in managing a class of children may appear [to have a] superior advantage the first day, the first week, the first month, or even the first year, as compared with some other teacher who has a much more vital command of the psychology, logic and ethics of development. But later "progress" may with such consist only in perfecting and refining skills already possessed. Such persons seem to know how to teach, but they are not students of teaching. Even though they go on studying books of pedagogy, reading teachers' journals, attending teachers' institutes, etc., yet the root of the matter is not in them, unless they continue to be students of subject-matter, and students of mind-activity. Unless a teacher is such a student, he may continue to improve in the mechanics of school management, but he cannot grow as a teacher, an inspirer and director of soul-life.

CASE STUDY: ENGLISH DEPARTMENT CHAIR'S HALLWAY (UNDERSTANDING THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS)

One of the primary challenges in developing curriculum based on standards is that teachers differ in their beliefs about what should be taught in a school's shared curriculum given their own interests, knowledge, and previous instruction.

In this case study, you will learn about the different English curricula at high schools within the same district. Teachers at each of these three schools believe they have the right to teach according to their own passions, knowledge, and interests, and are therefore reluctant to adopt the CCSS into their curriculums. Due to the tension felt within the three departments, the English Department chairs are meeting to discuss how they can get teachers to understand how they can maintain autonomy in exceeding the standards.

You, as a recent graduate who is familiar with the standards, are called upon to share your ideas in this meeting. The Department chairs are hoping to pick your brain in developing a plan for gaining teacher buy-in to devising curriculum consistent with the CCSS.

Find two to three peers and go to the Literaryworlds.org site and then to the Teaching to Exceed Virtual School link to go to this case study in Chapter 1 on the literaryworlds.org site.

Summary

In this chapter, we described the critical inquiry framework that we draw on in this book for describing ways to implement the ELA CCSS. This framework consists of three components:

identifying problems and issues, adopting alternative perspectives on those problems or issues, and fostering change to address those problems and issues. In Chapter 2, we compare our critical inquiry approach to other curriculum models of ELA instruction, as well as issues in implementing the CCSS, leading to Chapter 3 in which we describe how to draw on this approach for planning instruction to address the CCSS.

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