**FROM:**

**Teaching to Exceeding the English Language Arts Common Core**

**State Standards: A Critical Inquiry Approach for 6-12 Classrooms, 2nd ed.**

By Richard Beach, Amanda Haertling Thein, & Allen Webb. Routledge (2015)

**The Common Core State Standards and the Standards Movement**

The CCSS have now been adopted by most states, though even, at the time of this Second Edition (2015), these states are still trying to figure out how to assess student learning, and school districts, schools, and teachers are still stumbling over how the Common Core standards should be implemented.

The adoption of the CCSS builds on different “standards-based” reform efforts that began in the 1980s. President George Bush’s No Child Left Behind legislation (2001) required individual states to set standards. However, governors became concerned that different state standards and different ways that those standards were assessed made it appear that some states were doing a better educational job than others. Moreover, after years of the No Child Left Behind approach, there were still many high school students who lacked the abilities and skills associated with success in college, a problem particularly acute in lower income communities where people of color are overrepresented.

The CCSS were initiated by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers working with Achieve, Inc.; the American College Testing Program (ACT); publishing/testing companies; and 16 education associations in the Learning First Alliance. States then adopted the standards in order to apply for funding from President Obama’s “Race to the Top” educational grant initiatives in 2010. The hope of the CCSS was that, once again, education would be improved by issuing standards, this time a more consistent set of goals across states.

Contrary to widespread political opposition to the Common Core Standards, public opinion supports the idea of national standards to enhance the quality of instruction. One survey found that 85% of those surveyed voiced support for consistent standards to enhance learning expectations and 97% posited the need for students to engage in critical thinking and application of that thinking to lived-world problems (The Leadership Conference Education Fund, 2015).

We believe that English language arts teachers can view the adoption of the CCSS as an opportunity to generate innovative, engaging curriculum that will enhance instruction in our discipline, raise intellectual aspirations for all students, and, to the extent possible, improve the public’s regard for schools.

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**Limitations of the CCSS**

At the same time, as we have suggested and will continue to explore throughout this book, there are a number of limitations associated with adoption of the CCSS. It is natural that a book about a critical inquiry approach to teaching the Common Core Standards should also critically inquire into those standards themselves.

It is useful to recognize that the introduction of the CCSS in 2010 occurred in the midst of a larger school reform push related to the failures of NCLB, the adoption of testing to evaluate teachers, the push for market-based privatization of schooling through charters, challenges to teacher unions and tenure, reduction of school funding, increases in child poverty rates, increases in college costs and debt that affect teachers’ debt burden, and an economy that was and is slow to recover from the Great Recession (Karp, 2013-2014). The factors have placed additional burdens on teachers, who may then also need to adopt relatively quickly to implementing the CCSS, resulting in their resistance for doing so. As Diane Ravitch (2014) noted:

The way the standards are being rushed into classrooms across the country is further undercutting their credibility. These standards have never been fully implemented in real schools anywhere. They're more or less abstract descriptions of academic abilities organized into sequences by people who have never taught at all or who have not taught this particular set of standards. To have any impact, the standards must be translated into curriculum, instructional plans, classroom materials, and valid assessments. A reasonable approach to implementing new standards would include a few multi-year pilot programs that provided time, resources, opportunities for collaboration, and transparent evaluation plans.

While more teachers are receiving some kind of training in CCSS implementation with still less than half of these teachers in one national survey perceive this training as effective. One reason for teacher resistance to the Common Core Standards is that teachers notice that many of the same forces promoting privatization, charter schools, and increased testing are also at work in formulating and promoting the CCSS. CCSS derived not from educators or teacher unions or their professional organizations, but from a coalition of state governors, foundations, entrepreneurs, testing companies, and businesses identified by Jory Brass (2014) as:

policy entrepreneurs (e.g., Student Achievement Partners), venture philanthropy (e.g., Gates Foundation, Pearson Foundation, GE Foundation), neoconservative think tanks (Fordham Foundation), corporate executives (e.g., Business Roundtable), and non-governmental trade organizations (Achieve, Inc., National Governors Association) in “partnership” or “consortia” with education publishers (e.g., Pearson Corporation, McGraw-Hill) and standardised testing companies (Education Testing Service, ACT, College Board). (p. 126)

There was only one teacher on the initial group drafting the CCSS; one of the lead writers on that group, David Coleman, now head of the College Board, was never a teacher. Having these groups and not educators develop the CCSS has that they frame school reform in terms of a neoliberal discourse of business management that values “competition” and “accountability” through “measureable outcomes” including standardized testing as well as privatization of public education (Brass, 2014). Such “reform” creates the need for purchase of new “Common-Core-compatible” textbooks, scripted curriculum, online curriculum materials, and tests financially benefitting publishing and testing companies such as Pearson, McGraw-Hill, Houghton-Mifflin-Harcourt, ETS, and ACT.

**Standardization of Instruction**

Although this book will argue that the CCSS can be interpreted in productive ways that enhance students’ literacy learning, adopting a standards-based approach guiding instruction itself can result in the *standardization* of instruction. The CCSS recognize that standardization is not the same thing as *holding high standards*. The key to effective standards-based reform is in the implementation.

Precisely in order to achieve outstanding intellectual and academic accomplishment, the CCSS set general goals for student learning but they do not specify *what* or *how* to teach as was often the case with NCLB state standards. There is no “canon” or specific “privileged cultural knowledge” prescribed. Indeed, the CCSS do not create a common, core, required, or national curriculum of any kind. The Introduction to the CCSS makes clear,

A great deal is left to the discretion of teachers and curriculum developers. The aim of the Standards is to articulate the fundamentals, not to set out an exhaustive list or a set of restrictions that limits what can be taught beyond what is specified herein. (p. 2)

As Rebecca Sipe (2009) notes, “standards provide a definition of what is possible, but *standards are not curriculum documents*” (p. 41). Nor do they specify, describe, or set forward any general or specific teaching methods. It is teachers as "knowledgeable and engaged professionals [who] are the most important factor in the improvement of adolescent literacy" (p. 41). So, if the standards are properly implemented, it should be significantly up to you as the teacher, collaborating with your colleagues and districts, to develop the curriculum and teaching approaches you will use.

Yet, there is a long-standing, historical tension in educational reform efforts between top-down standardization versus a bottom-up focus on the local classroom context and unique student needs:

On one side are administrative reformers that have consistently argued that the primary

goal of schooling is a uniform structure in the mold of Taylor-style [assembly line] industrialism. On the other side are the pedagogical reformers who proffer that schools should recognize and adapt to the individual capacities and interests of students rather than systemic standardization—a position that aligns more closely with John Dewey's

socio-constructivist conception of teaching and learning. (Schneider, 2014, p. 16)

The needs, abilities, knowledge base and interests of teachers and students vary from school to school, from classroom to classroom, and even within every classroom; they cannot be standardized. Much of the resistance to top-down, bureaucratic imposition of standards has derived from teachers who value a bottom-up focus on their own unique, local school cultural context and particular students’ needs, interest, and knowledge. Enforcing the same learning on all students, as some have mistakenly advocated on the basis of “standards,” slows down the most capable students and leaves behind those already struggling, creates inappropriate limitations on what students can accomplish, and in effect, dumbs down teaching and learning. As Christopher Tienken (2011) notes:

Standardization is a Pollyanna approach to policy making. One cannot simply separate curriculum from culture, emotions, personal backgrounds, prior experiences, prior knowledge, and stages of cognitive and social development….Mandating that everyone follow the same set of standards and perform at the same level of achievement guarantees that everyone will not get what they need and that certain groups of students, those that do not fit into the new system, will lose out. These latter students will be labeled “not proficient” or “in need” of academic remediation, when perhaps they just need more choices, more pathways, and more diversity of curricula within the system (p. 61).

As was the case with the NCLB state standards, having to address a myriad of different standards resulted in fragmented curriculum organized around addressing isolated standards as opposed to an integrated, well-balanced, curriculum that builds increasingly sophisticated connections and understandings between units. For example, teachers were told to list a specific “standard for the day,” on the board and then to teach just to that standard, leading to standards-based grading where teachers check off that students have “achieved” a standard.

Attempting to address individual standards in isolation shifts the goal of your teaching from fostering engaging learning that addresses the complexity of participation in any language arts activity, to an intellectually impoverished isolation of skills and knowledge in the name of “meeting a standard.” The Introduction to the CCSS specifically states,

While the Standards delineate specific expectations in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language, each standard need not be a separate focus for instruction and assessment. Often, several standards can be addressed by a single rich task. (p. )

Advocates for adopting a standards-based approach argue that standards enhance student achievement. However, there is also no strong evidence indicating that adopting standards will necessarily improve student achievement. For instance, there is no strong correlation between National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores and high state standards (Mathis, 2010). There is also no strong correlation between international test performance and countries with national standards (Tienken, 2008). Countries such as the Nordic countries or Canada have no national standards but its students score well in international reading tests (Mullis et al., 2006). Likewise, research suggests that standards may have negative effects on non-white students’ performance and dropout rates (Mathis, 2010).

When the Common Core Standards are misinterpreted or perverted and become a rote standardization of learning the curriculum will also likely emphasize the need for individual students achieve standards on their own. This presupposes that literacy learning is a solo, isolated effort as opposed a situated, social activity essential to critical inquiry. As Avila & Moore (2012) note:

Doing critical literacies, with standards in mind, will always be a tense process because

critical literacies often operate from a sociocultural definition of literacy while standards

define literacy proficiency in individual students (Luke, 2000, p. 459); their agendas are

divergent, and, some might say, mutually exclusive. (p. 54)

Standardization of instruction in decontextualized, prescriptive ways are often promoted by certain organizations or publishers as a means to sell curriculum materials or textbooks. As Moore et. al (2014) note, these organizations are attempting to define how the CCSS should be implemented in a manner that is:

           anathema to the spirit and methods of critical literacy. To put it another way, the CCSS

say “This is what literacy is. Use it this way.” Critical literacy asks, “What is literacy for

me, for us, for this community, this time, in this place, and how can it be used by all of

us to reach our goals?” (p. 143).

Standardization may also lower rather than raise achievement if teachers teach the same content using the same methods regardless of differences in their classroom contexts or students (Kohn, 2010). Such homogenization often occurs when schools or districts adopt “teacher-proof,” scripted curriculum programs or mandated textbook series that allow for little teacher development of their own curriculum.

Narrow textbooks, pre-packaged or scripted curricula, mass-marketed worksheets, and one-size-fits-all-teaching or curriculum implementation do not and will not fulfill the high expectations of school reform that all of us want and that, taken at their best, the Common Core Standards envision. Conceptions of English language arts that are out-of-date, uninformed about advances in the content of our field, evolving literary canons, emerging literary and social science scholarship, and changing literacy demands in the digital age are not appropriate to the high stakes and progressive vision of school improvement intended by these standards. Informed administrators and curriculum specialists understand this and work to support teacher professional knowledge, research, decision-making, risk-taking, and freedom to experiment, grow, and improve, year after year. (For more on strengths and limitations of the CCSS, see *Strengths and limitations of the CCSS* on the website).

**Limitations of Learning Progressions in Grade-Level Standards**

The grade-level-by-grade-level standards are based on a developmental hierarchy of *learning progressions* involving increasingly more complex, sophisticated ways of addressing the core standards based on assumptions about students’ developmental differences across different grade levels--that 12th grade students are cognitively and socially able to engage in certain practices that would be more challenging for 6th graders.

For example, for the anchor standard related to interpretation of point of view or perspective, “assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text,” there are increasingly more difficult standards for grades 6 - 12. The grade-level specific standards for this anchor standard then is based on some learning progression associated with assumptions about students’ ability to interpret point of view or perspective--the belief that given their knowledge of and ability to empathize with others’ point of or adopt alternative perspectives, that high school students may be better able to address this standard than middle-school students. So, the grade level standards begins in the 6th grade with being able to simply describe point of view in a text. This leads to a focus on describing competing points of view in grade 7 to interpreting how disparities between reader and character perspective results in dramatic irony in grade 8. Then, for grades 9-10, students focus on how authors develop their own perspective or stance in a text, and, for grades 11-12, how authors employ satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement to convey multiple, alternative perspectives. The fact that the high school grade level standards focus more on inferring authors’ point of view or perspectives reflects the assumption that high school students are cognitively more likely able to infer how an author’s use of language represents a particular point of view or perspective than middle-school students.

The concept of learning progressions is also based on the need to develop curriculum that builds on students’ on students’ previous learning experiences, so that, for teaching at the concept is that when working with students at particular grade levels, you should be able to draw on these learning progressions to refer back to what students have previously acquired in earlier grades to prepare them for addressing standards at their current grade level. If students are having difficulty achieving their grade-level standard, you may also revert back to earlier-grade standards to create activities based on those earlier standards. If, for example, students are having difficulty contrasting different characters’ perspectives at the 8th grade level, you may need to develop activities related to inferring characters’ perspectives associated with achieving grade 7 standards.

However, there are a number of problems with the concept of a “learning progressions” continuum that identifies certain standards as appropriate for certain grade levels. This continuum is based on cognitive stage development models that presuppose that at different age levels, students are cognitively capable or incapable of employing certain literacy practices. For example, based on notions of early adolescents’ presumed egocentricity, that they have difficulty adopting perspectives other than their own, assumptions are made about their ability to adopt multiple, alternative perspectives.

These cognitive stage models fail to consider how students’ ability to employ literacy practices varies according to differences between students, texts, activities, and contexts. For example, students’ ability to adopt characters’ perspectives may vary according to individual differences within your class as well as differences due to the complexity of a text’s language, students’ understanding of or motivation to participate in your activity. Given this variation, it is difficult to make generalizations about your entire class’s ability to address particular standards based on a lock-step, hierarchical continuum when learning the literacy practices in English language arts requires a more holistic, recursive experience.

The arbitrary nature of the grade level learning progressions is evident in the following 6th, 7th, and 8th grade standards related figurative language use:

- 6th grade. Interpret the *figurative and connotative meanings* of words and phrases as

they are used in a text.

- 7th grade. Interpret the figurative and connotative meanings of words and phrases as

they are used in a text and describe in detail a specific *word choice* and its impact on

meaning and tone.

- 8th grade. Explain the comparisons an author makes through *metaphors, allusions, or*

*analogies* in a text and analyze how those comparisons contribute to meaning.

If it is assumed the only by 8th grade that students should study use of metaphors may mean that 6th graders may not learn to “interpret the figurative and connotative meanings” without studying metaphors.

Assuming that students, based on a presumed “learning progression” continuum, may not be able to engage in certain literacy practices, may underestimate students’ abilities especially when they are engaged and motivated. Holding high expectations does not mean, for example, that 6th grade teachers should only address “how an author establishes the point of view.” 6th grade teachers need to be aware of the whole range of complexity of meaning, up to and including the 12th grade standard of understanding “various layers of meaning.” In English one kind of knowledge does not always lead step-by-step to the next kind of knowledge. While these learning progressions may have logical appeal, they typically have no basis in empirical research and over-simply students’ literacy learning. Indeed, the specific progressions laid out in the standards are not necessarily related to how skills and learning are actually acquired. For instance, suggesting that “dramatic irony” is somehow age appropriate for 8th graders and “taking a stance on a social issue” is age appropriate to 9th or 10th graders has no logical basis.

Moreover, the idea that “taking a stance on a social issue” is an intellectually more advanced skill that somehow follows or is dependent on prior knowledge of “dramatic irony” is equally illogical. Students of all ages need to consider how authors take stances on issues and how the knowledge of the reader or audience may differ from the knowledge of characters in a story (dramatic irony). In this sense, we recommend caution in applying learning progressions established by a presumed continuum of development in planning instruction.

Rather than making instructional decisions based on simplistic grade-level-by-grade-level learning progressions, we recommend that you view entire set of language arts standards holistically and focus on designing those activities or events that you believe are most likely to engage your particular group of students based on their unique needs, knowledge, abilities, and interests. Evoking student motivation by engaging in rich, complex, relevant, and meaningful learning is the best way to set high standards and to meet and exceed the Common Core State Standards.

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**Limitations of Standardized Assessments and Teacher Evaluation**

One major challenge facing the CCSS implementation is that is it occurring at the same time as the increased use of test scores for assessing teachers’ effectiveness as determined by changes in their students average test scores over the period of a year. These “value-added” policies for basing evaluation of teachers based on their students’ test scores were promoted at the state level as well as by Race To The Top federal funding that required such testing along with adoption of the CCSS (Fairbanks, 2014). For example, beginning in 2012 in New York State, 20% of teachers’ evaluations are based on local test scores and 20% on changes in students’ scores on standardized state tests. This means that in addition to administrators’ classroom evaluations, 40% of a teacher’s evaluations are based on test scores leading to ratings of highly effective, effective, developing or ineffective. For one year, a teacher’s students may achieve high scores, resulting in a that teacher being rated as effective or highly effective, but is that same teachers students the following year has students who have lower scores simply given differences in the nature of those students, particularly for teachers with students from low-income families. This was particularly a problem for teachers in New York where the state tests employed in 2013-2014 were themselves more difficult than previous years resulting in lower student test scores and therefore declines in teacher evaluations, although in Fall, 2014, 94% of New York teachers were still receiving highly effective or effective ratings (Fairbanks, 2014). These policies also led teachers in Atlanta to alter tests so that their schools would not be penalized. This problem is further compounded by proposed policy changes in 2015 to assess graduates of teacher education programs by their students’ test scores leading to evaluations of teacher education programs themselves based on those scores.

This increased focus on test scores to evaluate teachers presupposes a strong relationship between what is measured on a standardized test and what students are being taught or acquired in a teacher’s classroom. However, results of items on standardized tests often may bear little relationship with the what and how students are learning in a teacher’s classroom, leading to perceptions of those test as not valid or fair measures of a teacher’s teaching ability, as well as leading to test-preparation instruction at the expense of the critical inquiry methods proposed in this book. As of Summer, 2015, the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in Congress included decoupling use of test scores for assessing teachers, as well as reducing the role of the federal government through providing individual states with more autonomy in implementing the CCSS. (For links to individual states’ CCSS sites, see *State departments of education CCSS sites* on the website.)

**Standards and the Critical Inquiry Approach**

While, for better and worse, the CCSS do draw on a variety of traditions in English teaching, there are a number of dimensions in the CCSS that are strongly supportive of the critical inquiry approach we advocate. The Introduction to the standards sets forward that they support an “integrated model of literacy” where reading, writing, speaking, and listening are blended together rather than treated as isolated skills or practices. The Introduction explains that,

To be ready for college, workforce training, and life in a technological society, students need the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas, to conduct original research in order to answer questions or solve problems, and to analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and nonprint texts in media forms old and new. (p. 1)

These positions are central to the critical inquiry approaches set forward in this book. The CCSS envision a strong emphasis on informational text that can be blended into language arts instruction. This is also entirely consistent, in fact, informational text becomes more meaningful, when part of a critical inquiry approach that also includes a wide range of materials including literary.

There has been confusion on the part of some administrators and teachers, however, when it comes to reading the table in the Introduction that established that by 12 grade 70% of reading should be “informational” and 30% literary. Take into consideration that it is clearly stated that these percentages are meant to be inclusive of all reading of informational texts in the 12th grade, *including texts in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects.* The 70% figure for informational text is for all of 12th grade taken together, not just for the English Language Arts class alone.

The CCSS on writing standards emphasize argumentative writing and requires attention to audience, purpose, and rhetorical context. A recent study of the teaching of argumentative writing in 31 English language arts classrooms found that what counted as argument and effective argumentative writing varied from classroom to classroom, and in turn the types of activities the teachers and students engaged in varied, leading to different trajectories of writing development made available to the students (Newell, Bloome, & Hirvela, 2015). This focus on argumentative writing is a logical and natural part of a critical inquiry classroom.  It builds on fostering argument in discussions in which students learn to formulate claims and supporting evidences in deliberative, respectful ways in “political classrooms” to address questions such as “how should we live together” (Hess & McAvoy, 2012).

Of course, “critical inquiry” can itself be standardized, though terms like “critical inquiry” and “critical literacy” are sometimes used in textbooks or curricular materials in ways that are not especially meaningful or authentic or in ways that trivialize questions of inquiry or reintroduce teacher-centered curriculum. As as result, students may end up engaging in “critical inquiry” based on the teacher’s rather than their own terms. As Maren Aukerman (2012) notes:

These practices may paradoxically reify the notion that the teacher is the one with textual

authority and, as a result, students continue to be enveloped in situations where they are

obligated to try to read and understand the text just one way—as the teacher wants them

to. (p. 43)

Analysis of instruction based on scripted steps for engaging in critical inquiry contained in an Open Court textbook and curriculum guide found that the teachers conformity to the scripted curriculum served to marginalize students’ own input and engagement (Pandya, 2012). The teachers’ conformity to the textbook and guide:

made students’ difficult and out-of-bounds inquiries inappropriate through a combination of outright rejection of ideas and subtle maneuvering. The pressure to conform to the cycle, and to push students to do the same, drained the process of any potential for the development of critical literacy skills, as the teacher, and the students, were more interested in following directions than they were in asking questions of and about texts. (Pandya, 2012, p. 24)

Moving beyond a scripted or teacher-centered critical inquiry approach involves engaging students in dialogic, inclusive, and a wider range of competing perspectives and voices associated with addressing issues or problems (Aukerman, 2012). Rather than attempting to arrive at a consensus perspective, as an advocate of critical inquiry you are inviting students to express alternative, dialogic perspectives (Heidebrink-Bruno, 2014). In doing so, students recognize that texts are not neutral in that they reflect their author’s particular perspectives, discourses, or narrative and often serve to position the audience in limited ways (Janks, 2014, p. 2). When students’ own perspectives are honored as valuable, just as those of the teacher or their peers are valuable, students become more confident about publicly voicing their critiques.

However, because these standards may be employed to support traditional formalist ways of learning, it is important that the standards be translated in terms of uses of digital/media to *build social relationships and connections,* and address learning to *critically analyze* the media and Internet resources. As Jerome Harste (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2014) notes:

No standards address functions of literacy such as reflection, personal growth, civic

participation, social change, or the formulation of public identities in the technological

and global environments of the Internet...literacy gets reduced to reading academic texts,

some modern, but with more emphasis on 18th-, 19th-, and 20th century literature.

Bomer and Maloch (2011) assert that “these standards argue that students go to school to

learn how to go to school some more” (p. 40). The standards, they argue, advocate the

reading of complex texts for the purposes of writing complex textual responses. What is

emphasized is academic reading and writing rather than personal or critical response to

reading and writing in the real world. (p. 175)

Fostering “connected learning” (Ito et al, 2013) involves adopting roles of social planner, facilitator, and co-learner that differ from the traditional teacher role of conveyor of knowledge. It entails learning about and building on your students’ knowledge and expertise in planning activities so that they perceive themselves as valued members of the classroom affinity space. From this perspective the ELA curriculum goes beyond covering a body of knowledge to learning the literacy practices involved in operating in and contributing to these passionate affinity spaces.

Sometimes as a new or student teacher you face the challenge of operating in spaces and curricula over which you have little control. This requires a politically-delicate balancing act of adopting status-quo spaces and curriculum while at the same time being willing to experiment with new ways of teaching ELA. For example, while you may be required to adopt your school’s curriculum mandates tied to the Common Core State Standards, you can also develop innovative ways of teaching that curriculum by framing the construction of your classroom affinity space as itself the curriculum. You also need to recognize that you can have a significant role in determining what reading, writing, speaking, listening, and media texts are taught in your classroom; what topics, issues, themes, and ideas you will cover; and what sequence will best achieve the Common Core State Standards. You will be in the best position to justify these choices if you are able to articulate their basis in your beliefs about student learning. This book will aid you in sorting through those beliefs.

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**Activity: Making group presentations about implementing the CCSS**

Prepare a presentation to the class on one of the following topic/question assigned to your group.  Include the standard or the language that you are discussing.

- Select one or two anchor (non-grade-level) standards and describe how you would implement these standards based on adoption of the critical inquiry framework described in Chapter 1.

- Compare and contrast an anchor standard with several related specific standards. Some schools only emphasize specific grade-level standards; some experts recommend only focusing on anchor standards. What is gained or lost by either approach? Talk about in general, and with specifics from the example you chose.

- Identify three anchor standards that you believe are important for students to achieve, provide reasons for their importance, and how you would implement them.

- Identify a standard that you believe would be difficult for a particular group of students to achieve, giving reasons why that standard would be difficult. Then, propose some activities designed to help students address these potential difficulties.

- Identify a learning progression between at least three different grade levels and talk about what you like and don’t like about that learning progression. Drawing on your specific example, and your reading of other learning progressions, how would you judge the effectiveness of the learning progressions in the CCSS in general?

- Review the texts listed as text exemplars in the CCSS Appendix B. Assess what you believe would be the potential appeal/understanding or lack of appeal/understanding for these exemplars relative to certain groups of students, noting reasons for assessments.

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**Examining Misperceptions of the CCSS**

Teachers may implement the CCSS based on misinterpretations of the CCSS listed below. Based on discussions of one or more of these approaches, explain why such a misinterpretation may have occurred and why this approach might be limited, ineffective, or ill advised. Then, formulate some alternative approaches that would be richer or better than these approaches. Finally, describe what you could do if, in a school setting, you were told that you needed to follow one or more of these approaches.

ELA teachers:

- must teach only text dependent “close reading.”

- must teach all students at the same grade level the same material at the same time.

- have to follow a scripted “teacher proof” instructional plan.

- are required to teach one standard per day, every day, always a different standard.

- are required keep a grade book that separately grades every student on every standard.

- are required to teach long units, or even full semesters, focused on test taking skills.

- are required to teach only standards for a given grade level.

- are told they can only teach from the approved textbook.

- are told that they can only teach texts from the Common Core Standards list of text

exemplars.

- are support personnel in a computer lab where students systematically work through an

entirely online curriculum to meet Common Core Standards.

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**Activity: Contextualizing the CCSS: Conflicting Perspectives on the CCSS**

Adopting a critical inquiry approach involves recognizing conflicting perspectives on a problem or issue. It is certainly the case that there has been strong opposition to and heated debates about implementation of the CCSS. Based on reading material reflecting conflicting perspectives on the CCSS on the website *http://tinyurl.com/pgzrjqj*, identify the pro-con arguments formulate by these groups:

-       conservative politicians who perceive the CCSS as an imposition by “big government” on local schools, leading them to call for rejecting adoption of the CCSS in their states.

-       students and parents opposed to the PARCC and Smarter Balanced testing associated with standardized testing mandates derived from the NCLB testing mandates.

-       educators and employers who posit the need for more “rigorous” instruction related to potential success in college/workplace

-       educators and policymakers opposed to standards as the imposition of a neoliberal, “accountability” agenda onto schools associated with standardization of instruction.

Then, in a face-to-face or online role-playing activity in your methods course in which a state board of education is holding a hearing as to whether their state should adopt, reject, or modify the CCSS, assume one of the above roles to then testify to members of the state board of education who themselves may have different perspectives on the CCSS. In your testimony, consider adopting a discourse consistent with the ways of knowing or attitudes constituting your role, for example, an education discourse of “standardization” (Avila & Moore, 2012). At the end of the role-play, members of the board of education vote on whether to adopt, reject, or modify the CCSS, giving reasons for their vote.