Needless to say and everywhere you look, the English Language Arts–Common Core State Standards (ELA-CCSS) are front and center in the teaching of reading in the United States. Not only is the ELA framework the hottest topic of 2013 according to the What’s Hot, What’s Not Literacy Survey (Cassidy & Grote-Garcia, 2012), it is also the infrastructure of U.S. reading education today (and tomorrow).

Already at work in most states, the framework is required knowledge for every beginning teacher of reading and central to his or her planning for reading instruction. In this column we consider the impact of the ELA-CCSS grand design on new teachers of reading who must do what has to be done if students are to be college and career ready. Topics of our prior columns, such as classroom management and teaching vocabulary, focused on important components of teaching reading. However, here we step back and focus on the big picture policy that influences the particulars of reading instruction.

Commonplaces
It was Joseph Schwab (1983), a University of Chicago professor of education and natural sciences, who described the commonplaces of teaching, referred to as the content, the students, the milieu (context), and the teachers themselves (Eisner, 1984; Shulman, 1984). These are the universals of teaching that educators share, discuss, research, and argue about (incessantly). All four topics, he proposed, need to be duly considered and coordinated for effective curriculum design, because favoring one over

Kathleen Roskos • Susan B. Neuman

The department editors welcome reader comments. Kathleen Roskos is a professor at John Carroll University, University Heights, Ohio, USA; e-mail roskos@jcu.edu. Susan B. Neuman is a professor at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, USA; e-mail sbneuman@umich.edu.
another—as you might predict—leads to a lopsided curriculum.

Now, commonplaces—these universals of teaching—are worth thinking about when applying a common core to the teaching of reading. And for this very reason: A common core will surely shape each commonplace of teaching and, in so doing, shape the interplay of them all. We cannot fully control this dynamic, but we can be thoughtful about it. Coordination is key to creating a strong, rich reading curriculum that meets high standards in local classrooms (Porter, 2011). With the goal of coordination in mind, let’s consider how the Common Core is shaping the commonplaces of the reading curriculum and our participatory role in this process.

Reading Program Content
The Common Core is not a curriculum. It is a set of standards around which curriculum (aka reading programs) can be built—the specifications that inform program instructional content. The set does not tell how, but rather what students are expected to learn. The Reading Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010a) reflect the broader goals of CCSS architecture:

- Alignment with college and work expectations
- Clarity of expression
- Rigor
- A foundation in what exists (state standards and those of top-performing countries)
- An evidence base

They are organized into anchor standards for K–12 and for disciplinary content (e.g., science, social studies).

And these “anchors” are further specified in grade-level standards and indicators for K–5 and 6–12.

The Reading Standards organization is noteworthy because it structures reading content into two broad grade bands: K–5 and 6–12. This structure is different from the historic primary grade (K–3), intermediate grade (4–8), and high school (9–12) arrangement deeply embedded in reading pedagogy and our teacher minds. Only recently, in fact, has kindergarten been included in the standards architecture, added in the year 2000 round of standard-setting work of states (Roskos & Vukelich, 2006).

Changes in organizational structure prompt changes in thought. And so, we start to think differently about content under this new arrangement. Content in the first-grade program, for example, must prep beyond grade 3 to grade 5. As before, it must include foundational skills (the five essentials), but it also must more deliberately address the comprehension skills needed for close reading of literature and informational texts in the middle grades—in other words, explaining how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text, identifying which reasons and evidence support which point(s) (RI5–8). Similarly, content in the fifth-grade program must lay the groundwork for the analytical reading skills needed to read in high school and beyond—in other words, how to read with x-ray eyes that reveal what a text is about, its details, veracity, and significance.

The structure aside, the Reading Standards also outline the content of a reading program at a specific grade level, but not the whole of it. The scope of content in a reading program—its breadth and depth—may (and should) contain information, ideas, concepts, generalizations, principles, and the like that go beyond a common standards definition for a specific grade. With an eye to the future, cutting-edge content should be on the content radar screen because what students need to know and be able to do is not static.

Consider e-books, for example, now rapidly increasing as a text source. What new reading strategies must be developed at an early age when the basic element of reading, the page, is not present? Can reading skills transfer effortlessly from a print book environment to an e-book environment? Answers to new-age questions such as these produce new information that should be considered in the scope of

“The Common Core is not a curriculum. It is a set of standards around which curriculum (aka reading programs) can be built.”
content, even though presently outside the common core. Why? The content may be useful to the learner as an educated person in the future. In short, the content of a reading program should adhere to a shared body of content (the CCSS), but also remain open to new evidence-based content; otherwise, it may become too narrow in scope.

Learners

Core Reading Standards also affect the learners who experience them in their reading development and education. Those just beginning school—our eager, young kindergarteners—will feel less of the weight than those who are finishing school—our adolescents and young adults facing college and jobs. Beginners have the opportunity to pick up the pace early and to gain their stride, whereas those toward the finish line must work harder and faster to meet expectations. Those in the middle, however, may feel the squeeze of more rigorous standards the most, having to turn on a dime to become proficient at close reading in more complex texts.

The learner experience urges us to consider what is possible and most appropriate for students to become demanding readers. The Reading Standards are meant to "establish a ‘staircase’ of increasing complexity" (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010b) that quickens the pace of reading development. Readers, in short, need to grow up faster. Paraphrasing Bob the Builder: Can they do it? Well...we think they can!

Based on the wealth of research in early literacy over the last few decades, it is quite clear that young learners can explore and learn about print earlier than we thought. Recall that in the year 2000, kinder-bound children were expected to know only 10 alphabet letters (Head Start Benchmark), whereas now it is at 21 uppercase and 17 lowercase letters (Early Reading First Benchmark). Why? Because they can do it—when they are afforded high-quality early-literacy instruction.

Long-term trends on National Assessment of Educational Progress (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2012) indicate that middle graders can meet more rigorous reading standards. At age 9, the average reading score in 2008 was 4 points higher than in 2004 and 12 points higher than in 1971. Average reading scores for white, black, and Hispanic 9-year-olds were higher in 2008 than in all previous assessments. So, it is not only possible, but also appropriate to fast-forward middle years' reading development, provided that students can experience a challenging reading program with a laser-like focus on teaching academic language (Southern Regional Education Board, 2002).

Older students can also meet the challenge of new reading standards, as evidenced by two indicators: (1) about 59% of teens report regular participation in online reading, writing, and posting (Pew Internet & American Life Project, 2012); and (2) the amount of time they dedicate to print has remained stable at approximately 43 minutes per day for more than a decade (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005). Moreover, a recent survey of 81,000 students in 26 states found that two-thirds of high school students complain of boredom, usually because the subject matter lacked challenge or their teachers didn’t seem to demand more of them (Reuters, 2007). Well...it looks like adolescents can and should do more vigorous reading and writing that exercises their minds, not only their thumbs.

Milieu

In the end, Reading Standards function in local classroom environments—and, as we know, no two classrooms are exactly alike. Although Reading Standards may serve as a Common Core framework, they nonetheless must be integrated into the fabric of local classroom life and be responsive to the wider world if they are to really work. They must be well placed in the milieu in which they are practiced.

Much of this, of course, involves those closest to the classroom finding ways to make a common core work locally, which requires flexible thinking and imagination. To create CCSS-friendly environments for particular students in particular places brings to mind the principles of classroom design we described in our first column. If we want students to read like detectives (David Coleman in Goldstein, 2012), then we need to create places where they can explore, read, and interact like literate citizens in a participatory environment. A few reminders:

- Arrange the physical environment to meet instructional goals—When classroom time and space are in sync with reading, teaching, and learning, it is a beautiful thing. Physical space supports multiple configurations—large and small groups, triads and partners, and individual activity. Time is used effectively for reading instruction, practice, and enjoyment. The environment

“If we want students to read like detectives, then we need to create places where they can explore, read, and interact like literate citizens.”
is aesthetically pleasing, with complementary colors, textures, artifacts, and abundant print.

- Provide enough materials; organize them well—Materials are the durable goods of reading instruction. They are needed in sufficient amounts for effective instruction and should be easily available to students. They need to be meaningfully organized to support teachers and inform readers; they need to nurture reading habits of mind.

- Use walls to teach—the purposeful use of wall space provides a “living” textbook that tells the story of what students are reading and what they are learning. Clear, uncluttered displays, proper signage, and interesting graphics can enrich information from books and stretch text complexity.

- Create a participatory environment—The classroom environment (physical and social) supports students’ learning, which, of course, it should by helping them use print and digital resources to read, write, and think intelligently and imaginatively. However, it also should develop the teaching skills of students—their abilities to collaborate, demonstrate, mentor, and contribute to a literate milieu in the classroom and beyond.

**Teachers**
The fourth commonplace of teaching is the cornerstone of effective reading instruction—the teacher who carries out the work of implementing Reading Standards in reading programs every day. Surely, the Reading Standards will shape you as a beginning teacher of reading, because to implement them you will need to do the following:

- Know the Reading Standards specific to your grade band very well, making them routine in your instructional planning.

- Study Standard 10: Range, Quality, and Complexity of Student Reading and review and use the text exemplars and sample performance tasks for your grade level in Appendix B.

- Collaborate with your colleagues to align and implement the Reading Standards responsibly and responsively.

- Set a challenging pace for your students to become proficient readers from day 1.

- Take every opportunity to attend CCSS professional development activities.

Through these activities and experiences, the Reading Standards shape your reading instruction practice, and in turn, your practice brings new meanings to the Standards. In other words, standards shape, but also are shaped in the dynamics of everyday reading teaching. For your part, in the blooming confusion, do not become drowned out by the babble of those far removed from the realities of practice. After all, these are your first standards, and you bring a bubbling intellect, tech savvy, and fresh ideas to their implementation—and that means a lot.

**Community**
The commonplaces of teaching—those universals—are shared by each of us and known to all of us. But how do they work together to ensure a quality curriculum? Schwab (1983) proposed a committee structure coordinated by a chair well prepared and qualified to do the job of curriculum design. The committee, he suggested, should consist of eight or nine members: teachers and school administrators along with representatives of the community and students. This sounds familiar. Most reading initiatives, like the CCSS, include state and local advisory groups of diverse membership for purposes of planning and implementation. You already may be serving on one.
Schwab’s ideal committee, however, consisted of a rich mix of teachers—those familiar with the curricular area, those unfamiliar with it, and those with imagination and creativity. What this mix creates, he argued, is an eclectic professional community—one that pools knowledge, insights, and perspectives of reading pedagogy from multiple sources to envision new possibilities and change (Schwab, 1983).

Led by a knowledgeable master teacher, such as a reading specialist, literacy coach, or a teacher educator of reading, an eclectic professional committee can do wonders with a reading program that helps all students achieve rigorous standards. The challenge is how to arrange for and implement this kind of professional work with any regularity in the school environment. It is not easy, but not insurmountable if there is leadership, persistence, and patience. The how is equally as ambitious (and adventurous) as the what of core Reading Standards. Know this, though: You are somewhere in this rich mix of teachers. And you are very needed at the table, actively engaged in the deliberative process of making reading programs work around core reading standards that aim to develop more demanding readers—here, there, and everywhere.

There is, of course, more to this story, and you will play your part. For now, we bring our short discussion of commonplaces and the Reading Standards to a close. To be continued...in classrooms, halls, committee rooms, online, and around the proverbial water cooler.

REFERENCES


