Academic Writing and the Common Challenge of Readiness for College and Careers

Aspen Institute
Urban Literacy Leadership Network
Long Beach, CA
January 22, 2014

Session Objectives

- To build a **practical case** for focusing on academic **writing and rich tasks** in order to promote all students’ readiness for college and careers.

- To explore **strategies** for supporting ELA and content area teachers in understanding and implementing the CCSS for writing in **daily instruction**.

- To preview elements of Aspen’s new “Tools for Teachers” modules that can **support educators’ understanding** of CCSS writing demands.
Literacy Instruction and the CCSS

A Changed Landscape

BCC: Before Common Core

- Literacy standards implementation across the country typically prioritized students’ reading skills.
- Instruction of critical literacy skills was often “siloed” and taught primarily in the context of English Language Arts.
- According to the 2011 NAEP Writing Assessment, only 25% of the nation’s 8th graders reported writing more than a paragraph a day in their ELA class.
- Though the demands of college and careers have steadily increased over the last 50 years, too many students leave K-12 education without the reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language skills they need to succeed in the 21st century.
Team Reflection

- Within your district teams, discuss your reflections to the following questions:
  - How “siloed” is the responsibility for students’ literacy instruction in your district’s schools?
  - What are some of the quantitative and qualitative effects of this siloing?
  - What success has your district had in “de-siloing” literacy instruction among teachers and across content areas?

A Changed Landscape

Key Design Considerations of the Common Core
Tools for Teachers:
Engaging in Academic Writing
Implementing Key Shifts in the CCSS—Part Four

Why Key Design Considerations Matter

Key design considerations of the CCSS have important implications for writing instruction that can develop all students’ grade-level writing proficiency:

1. A school-wide approach to writing instruction integrates the CCSS for reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language in all grades.

2. Daily writing instruction is a shared responsibility across the curriculum to ensure students can communicate understanding effectively across a variety of subjects and for a variety of purposes.

3. Research is woven through the CCSS to ensure that students develop the abilities “to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas” that are essential for “college, workforce training, and life in a technological society.” (CCSS, p. 4)
Three Types of CCSS Writing

Writing Standard 1: Arguments use reasoning and evidence to defend a point of view or position and convince others to adopt that perspective or agree with a claim.

Writing Standard 2: Informative/Explanatory Writing aims to convey understanding about a subject, process, or concept.

Writing Standard 3: Narratives convey experiences about real or imagined stories, individuals, events, or procedures which can stand on their own or be integrated into explanations or arguments.

Time to Reflect

➢ To what extent do teachers and principals in your district understand and appreciate the CCSS’ Key Design Considerations?
➢ In how many of your district’s schools are the Key Design Considerations (i.e. shared responsibility, writing instruction at every grade level and across the curriculum, etc.) evident in school-based practice?
➢ How focused is central office on supporting principals to implement, monitor, and improve their school’s comprehensive literacy development program?
➢ Are there schools and principals in your district that can serve as support mechanisms and inform district strategy moving forward?
The Case for “Rich Tasks” in All Grades and Across the Curriculum

How Rich Tasks Can Support Students’ Readiness for College and Careers

Building a Case

- Literacy development is no longer the sole province of the ELA department. All language domains must be taught at every grade level and across the curriculum.

- Academic writing will feature prominently on next-generation assessments, including mathematics, and will call upon students to read, understand, apply, and create knowledge across content areas.

- All students must master three types of academic writing—arguments, informative/explanatory, and narrative—and be able to integrate writing types both within and across content areas.
Mastery and the CCSS

The CCSS Key Design Considerations make the imperative of teaching and learning clear: in order to achieve academic readiness for college and careers, students must be supported in mastering progressions of grade-level knowledge and skills.

Students advancing through the grades are expected to meet each year’s grade-specific standards, retain or further develop skills and understandings mastered in preceding grades, and work steadily toward meeting the more general expectations described by the CCR standards.
Mastery and the CCSS

The CCSS Anchor Standards discuss the importance of mastery across the curriculum – that is, in English Language Arts as well as literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects.

The concept of “mastery” not only plays an important role in the design and intent of the CCSS, a large number of ULLN member districts include the notion of “mastery” in their teaching effectiveness rubrics.
Time to Reflect

The CCSS discuss these critical aspects of mastery:
1. Mastery of the CCSS is a developmental process.
2. Mastery is supported along grade-level standard progressions.
3. Mastery is demonstrated across the curriculum.

How is mastery of the CCSS assessed?

The CCSS do not say much about instruction and assessment, but the introduction to the CCSS offers an important clue:

Focus and coherence in instruction and assessment

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.
What are “rich tasks”?

“Rich tasks” address multiple standards—sometimes across content areas—and provide students meaningful and engaging opportunities for feedback and deeper learning.

Instruction and assessment through “rich tasks” drives focus and coherence for teachers and students by:

- Integrating standards across language domains and content areas;
- Building on students’ current skills toward mastery;
- Including complex texts and multimedia across the curriculum so that students build strong content knowledge; and
- Prioritizing research and research projects.

Rich tasks are one means of evaluating progress toward mastery of the CCSS.

Sample Task

Literacy Design Collaborative Sample Argumentative Writing Task, grades 9-10:

Were the achievements and growth of the Industrial Revolution Era worth the cost to society? After reading primary and secondary sources pertaining to the British Industrial Revolution, write an argumentative essay that addresses the question. Support your position with evidence from the texts. Be sure to acknowledge competing views.
What makes this a “rich task”?

Literacy Design Collaborative Sample Argumentative Writing Task, grades 9-10:

Were the achievements and growth of the Industrial Revolution Era worth the cost to society? After reading primary and secondary sources pertaining to the British Industrial Revolution, write an argumentative essay that addresses the question. Support your position with evidence from the texts. Be sure to acknowledge competing views.

RH 1, 2, 4, 6, 7-9, 10

WHST 1, 4, 7-9, 10

- Addresses multiple standards in reading and writing
- Involves research using multiple sources
- Possible cross-curricular connections with ELA, social studies, and/or science
- This is task worth a teacher and student’s time and effort

Tools for Teachers: Writing Rubrics

CCSS-aligned instruction can be supported by employing rubrics keyed to the expectations of the CCSS, which should be used to provide specific information for improvement.
A Journey through the World Café

Collaborating on the Common Challenge of Implementing the CCSS for Writing in All Grades and Across the Curriculum