FEATURE ARTICLE

Find Where You Fit in the Common Core, or the Time I Forgot about Librarians and Reading

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T THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS

Encouraging reading, providing outstanding books and dependable access, and modeling enjoyment and appreciation for reading are not novel job responsibilities of school librarians. In the eyes of most students, teachers and school staff, and a large contingent of the general public, these activities are probably the most easily named of the work of school librarians. As a former school librarian, I know this. Yet somehow, when I was recently asked to name the five most important responsibilities of school librarians, my response was something along these lines: (1) technology leader, (2) teacher, (3) curriculum collaborator, (4) library program administrator, and (5) information specialist. Not long after the conversation, I had a moment of clarity and dread and focused on this thought: reading. I had forgotten to mention reading! I make a living by teaching future school librarians, and I had neglected to talk about reading as a critical part of school librarianship.

Upon some reflection, I think I had aimed my response toward addressing the breadth of responsibilities shouldered by today’s school librarians, knowing that the job of the school librarian can be misunderstood and often underestimated. My school library elevator speeches often have a “now more than ever” urgency: how school librarians are vital in helping students develop information evaluation skills, or how librarians introduce new technology tools for students to create and share content. I even talk with people in the grocery store about e-books, changing formats and ways of reading, and how libraries are still vital to schools and the public good.

It’s nearly a given that libraries of all kinds open the doors to reading. But in my attempts to counter or even anticipate arguments about school libraries’ place in a technology and information-saturated world, I had drifted from what should be a central message about school librarians’ role in promoting diverse ways of reading and interacting with texts in the classroom and in the school community. Proficient, transferable, intelligent reading and language skills are essential to meaningful participation in today’s technology and information environments. As such, these competencies serve as the foundation of 21st-century literacies outlined in the Common Core State Standards. Reading might be “a window to the world” for our students, as described in the Standards for the 21st Century Learner Common Beliefs (AASL, 2007), but reading is also a key that unlocks and establishes for school librarians an essential role in 21st-century teaching and learning. I have refined my “now more than ever” message about school librarians, and here, I share that message by examining how reading is addressed in the Common Core, and by considering how school librarians can connect reading with the skills that students need to live, learn, and work in an information and technology-centered world.

COMMON CORE ESSENTIALS

As of May 2012, all but five states have formally adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in Mathematics and all but four have adopted the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2011a; Gewertz, 2011). The complete standards and resources, including statements of support from education professionals and organizations, are available at www.corestandards.org. By way of a brief primer, the Common Core is a set of rigorous, research-based K-12 standards, developed by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The standards are internationally benchmarked and aligned with college and work expectations.

The Common Core presents an intriguing dimension to states’ control over curriculum and education systems, in that applications for the federal Race to the Top grants received points for adopting CCSS as part of their state-level education reform proposals (U.S Department of Education,
Although CCSS is a set of standards adopted by states across the country, it does not mandate teaching methods, and states retain flexibility in the implementation of the standards. For example, Massachusetts, which was awarded Race to the Top grant funds in 2010 in Phase 2 of the federal grant program, developed new curriculum frameworks in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, both of which were released in March 2011 (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011). The frameworks reflect the Common Core in content and format and add state-specific standards and resources, such as standards for pre-kindergarten in ELA and math and lists of classic and contemporary authors in ELA.

Other states such as Pennsylvania, which was awarded a Race to the Top grant in December 2011, report ongoing transitions and the development of crosswalk documents to align current benchmarks at grades 3, 5, 8, and 11 to the “staircase” (grade-by-grade) standards of the Common Core (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Across the country, organizations, commercial entities, and school district leaders are working to integrate CCSS into professional development, curriculum, and textbooks. Updating curriculum and textbooks to reflect new state requirements or district initiatives is not a new experience for most teachers and librarians, but the Common Core as an accepted framework across so many systems of education creates a new level of necessity for accompanying curriculum, teaching materials, and professional development. For example, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College Careers (PARCC) has released several chapters of a workbook designed to help states and districts plan for the implementation of the CCSS. Although the guide is aimed at administrators, much of the content relates to the expertise of school librarians, including selection of instructional materials, collaborative technologies, and assessment (Achieve, Inc. & U.S. Education Delivery Institute, 2011). School librarians must seize this opportunity to be leaders in the implementation of the CCSS by learning about the standards now, and communicating to principals and other administrators their willingness to participate on school and district level teams that are working to introduce the standards.

A key resource for librarians to know is AASL’s “Crosswalk of the Common Core Standards and Standards for the 21st-Century Learner,” which matches Standards for the 21st-Century Learner 1-4 to relevant Common Core Standards in ELA (K-5); reading in history (6-12), reading and literacy in science/technology; and writing (6-12). The web site also presents sets of standards aligned from the CCSS to Standards for the 21st-Century Learner. Crosswalks are also included in lessons in the Standards for the 21st-Century Learner Lesson Plan Database. Commercial products, such as the books available from the Common Core Mapping Project, add to the growing collection of CCSS guides. These and additional CCSS resources are listed in Table 1.

### Table 1. Examples of organizations and resources supporting Common Core State Standards implementation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization/Resource</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Association of School Librarians (AASL)</td>
<td>Crosswalk of the Common Core Standards and Standards for the 21st-Century Learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASCD (Formerly Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development)</td>
<td>White papers, book chapters, columns, articles (html and pdfs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common Core Curriculum Mapping Project</td>
<td>Books available for purchase, links to digital resources and Web 2.0 examples</td>
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<tr>
<td>International Reading Association (IRA)</td>
<td>Webinars, articles, and links to additional resources and organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)</td>
<td>Common Core Implementation Workbook</td>
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<tr>
<td>Partnership for 21st-Century Skills (P21)</td>
<td>P21 Common Core toolkit (pdf)</td>
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**THAT'S RICH: LITERARY AND INFORMATIONAL TEXTS IN THE SCHOOL LIBRARY**

By studying how critical reading of complex literary and informational texts and 21st-century research and writing skills are emphasized in the CCSS, school librarians can communicate to school leaders how their programs—and the school librarians as information professionals—are already poised to support the teaching of the Common Core. In its “Key Design Considerations,” the CCSS note, “often, several standards can be addressed by a single rich task” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010, p. 5). Well-designed school library learning experiences and assessments consistently represent “single rich task(s)” that cross literacies, subject areas, and critical thinking skills, and although the phrase “school library” does not appear in the Common Core State Standards for ELA, strategic school librarians will see themselves and potential collaborations throughout the standards.
MAGIC AND ADVENTURES


In this *Frog Princess* sequel, Princess Emeralda and Prince Eadric have to concoct a potion to change a friend's boyfriend from otter to human. If only sneezing didn't change them back to frogs... and then there's the invasion....


The school library is a place for interdisciplinary, collaborative, evolving thinking, productivity, and new knowledge—and rich tasks abound.

In the CCSS for ELA, the standards for grades K-5 encompass reading, writing, speaking and listening skills across subject areas. For grades 6-12, the CCSS for ELA is separated into two sections: the ELA classroom, and reading, writing, listening and speaking skills in the context of history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. This integration of reading and language skills across subject areas connects directly to the skills that school librarians teach when collaborating with classroom teachers to integrate information and digital literacies into the curriculum. For example, in Reading Standard 2 for Literacy in History/Social Studies, grades 6-8, students must “analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010, p. 61). The AASL Common Core Crosswalk connects this standard to Standards for the 21st-Century Learner 1.1.7: “Make sense of information gathered from diverse sources by identifying misconceptions, main and supporting ideas, conflicting information, and point of view or bias” (2011).

According to the CCSS Initiative, this interdisciplinary approach to reading is designed to prepare students to read across content areas in college and career settings, and as such, the emphasis on informational texts increases throughout the students' progression through the grade levels. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) Reading Assessment, with which the Common Core is aligned, names fiction, literary nonfiction, and poetry as types of literary texts, and informational text categories include exposition; argumentation and persuasion; and procedural text and documents (National Assessment Governing Board, U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The assessment shifts the balance of literary and informational texts from an even split in grade four, to 45 percent literary texts and 55 percent informational texts in grade eight, to 30 percent literary texts and 70 percent informational texts in grade twelve (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2011b).

The Common Core follows the NAEP's intensifying focus on informational texts through the grade levels. In the Common Core, stories, drama, and poetry are literature texts, and literary nonfiction is a type of informational text; both literature and literary nonfiction are represented in standards taught in the ELA setting. Further types of informational texts are those texts specific to the social studies/history and science/technical subjects (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). Both in and outside the ELA classroom, students are expected to read informational texts independently and proficiently. This is a learning outcome that can be accomplished via collaboration of school librarians and classroom teachers in designing, teaching, and assessing the reading and synthesis of informational texts—provided that the school librarians communicate this role and opportunity to teachers and administrators, particularly in planning assessment, curriculum, and professional development during the school year.

With research and media integrated throughout the standards and not treated as a separate section, school librarians can forge a strong tie between research skills and critical reading of complex texts. The Common Core identifies three factors in measuring text complexity: (1) qualitative evaluation of text (e.g., levels of meaning, knowledge demands), (2) quantitative evaluation of text (e.g., readability), and (3) matching reader to text and task (e.g., variables in reader—such as experience, and variables in task—such as purpose) (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010, p. 31). Deep, critical reading of complex texts supports the development of rich learning and informed, creative responses to information.

This interrelated set of language and communication skills is the foundation of the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects, which is designed to prepare students for the literacies required of 21st-century college programs and workforce training (Common Core State Standards Initiative,
Knowing efficient search strategies is only pieces of evidence. School librarians can make research instruction more powerful and more aligned with CCSS by participating in the reading process that takes place after the students find information. In order for students to make conclusions, create learning products (including those that take advantage of the newest technology tools), and self-assess their work and thinking, they must engage thoughtfully with texts to attain meaningful understanding. Knowing efficient search strategies is only truly helpful when it is part of a process in which students are also taught how to and take advantage of the newest technology tools, and self-assess their work and think, which students are also taught to and given adequate time to read and question the information they find.

When I was a middle school librarian, I once worked with a student who searched for distances between different planets and distances from the sun. He needed to find and present the information in a graphic organizer, but the questions were designed in such a way that required some thinking, conversion of miles and kilometers, and comparisons between sources. I sat next to this student and guided him through the use of tables of contents and indices, and slowly, he gathered and analyzed the information according to the specifics required by his teacher. After he finished his task, he let out a huge sigh and pushed back his chair from the table. I smiled, figuring that he was really proud of himself, and said to him, “You did it!” I was a little stunned and deflated when he said back to me with obvious exasperation, “Yeah, three books later!” I remember thinking—three books later? That’s what research is. But that very essence of research—messy, recursive, and cumulative reading and reflection—was satisfying and laborious for this student, at the very same time that it was energizing and motivating for me.

School librarians can support the reading of complex informational and literature texts by helping students to read and think about information they find in the library, and by encouraging teachers to model and support this part of reading and research in their teaching and in student assignments. But beyond the instruction of skills and strategies, librarians can model engagement with texts by sharing the affective part of this process—the part that we might not even realize we possess, but that which draws librarians to this part of the job and makes us feel invested in reading and research-related learning and information tasks. By sharing excitement about the reading part of research and of course by designing instruction that supports it, librarians can motivate students to interact more purposefully and deeply with information.

**CARPE DIEM AND THE COMMON CORE**

Maybe you’re a person who has always mentioned reading first as a goal of the library. Or perhaps, like I was not so long ago, you’re trying so hard to convince others that librarians do more than read books, that promoting and supporting reading becomes a more assumed part of the job. With the “thoughtful engagement with high-quality literacy and informational texts” piece of the Common Core vision of a literate person in the 21st century, school librarians have a clear and timely opportunity to lead the implementation of the Common Core, specifically with reading but also with writing, critical thinking, problem solving, and other areas of the CCSS that might not spell out “school librarian”—but speak clearly to the competencies of school library professionals. By placing the reading that’s always been a part of school library programs into the context of evolving emphases in school curriculum and the Common Core, school librarians can support productive learning, college and career readiness, and passionate investment in and pursuit of reading by students who are readers and “not-yet-readers” alike. When school administrators seek leaders in implementing the Common Core, please don’t let the absence of the words “school librarian” in the standards dissuade them—or you—from recognizing the librarian’s critical role in bringing these standards to life in the library, in classrooms, and in learning.
This ongoing series has been, from the beginning, as cunning and sharp as Zorro's blade, and it has yet to miss its mark.

Wagner and Crever have breathed Zorro's blade, and it has yet to miss its beginning, as cunning and sharp as the duty of the strong to the weak. Brave toil, and constantly reminding him of the value of mystery, the art of misdirection, and a purpose. Now, returned to an Alca, California, gripped by increasing Spanish corruption at the cost of peasant lives, Diego plays the part of the dandy by day, and at night—he is the fox the Spaniards fear.

Inspired by the revision of Zorro imagined by the Isabel Allende, Wagner and crew have breathed new life into the prototypical masked vigilante. The plotting is courageous, as risky as Zorro himself, providing rich details of colonial California (with only occasionally flawed Spanish) woven between escalating tales of derring-do. The minor characters—Diego's brother Bernardo, his lover interest Lolita, his father—draw out humanizing elements of the nearly superhuman Zorro, grounding his adventures in the memory of loss, providing him with an insightful and brave soul, and constantly reminding him of the duty of the strong to the weak. This ongoing series has been, from the beginning, as cunning and sharp as Zorro's blade, and it has yet to miss its mark.


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