

THESIS

A BURKEAN ANALYSIS OF THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:
REVEALING MOTIVE BY ANALYZING THE AGENT-PURPOSE RATIO
AND CRITIQUING THE STANDARDS WITH A POSTCOLONIAL LENS

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ABSTRACT

A BURKEAN ANALYSIS OF THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: REVEALING MOTIVE BY ANALYZING THE AGENT-PURPOSE RATIO AND CRITIQUING THE STANDARDS WITH A POSTCOLONIAL LENS

Public schooling in the United States undergoes frequent, large-scale reforms based on current political, social, and economic conditions. Such conditions influence the demand for students to master particular literacies and discourses. The Common Core State Standards, a recent educational reform measure that has been adopted by forty-six states, indicate what students need to know and be able to do at the end of each grade level in certain content areas. Examining particular aspects of the Common Core State Standards, such as the agents involved and their purpose in creating and implementing the Standards, helps to reveal implicit motives driving the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. This thesis seeks to reveal such motives in order to illuminate which literacies, literacy practices, and discourses are privileged in public schooling today. My findings indicate that the Common Core reinforces a Western, hegemonic, patriarchal discourse, which has the potential to Other non-dominant discourses and alienate students belonging to marginalized populations. Space exists, however, for teachers to employ pedagogies and methods that challenge this discourse, which ultimately can increase student agency and promote the democratic ideals of public education.

DEDICATION

For all schoolteachers and their students.

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INTRODUCTION

“Can I go with you to Colorado?” one of my colleagues turned around and asked me. By this time, I had resigned from my position as a high school teacher, and my colleagues knew that I had enrolled in graduate school at Colorado State University. When she asked me this question, we were sitting in a staff meeting, and our department chair was explaining what she learned about the impending implementation of the PARCC tests in the state of Ohio. She handed us a packet that explained how the standardized writing tests would operate. Everyone in the room fell silent. Then my colleague turned around. I still remember her half-playful, half-serious tone when she said it: “Can I go with you to Colorado?”

Teachers in forty-six states (as of this writing) are adjusting to the adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards (Common Core or CCSS). This document indicates what public school students need to know or be able to do at the end of each grade level in mathematics and English Language Arts. When I was working as a teacher in Ohio, I knew that the state had adopted the Common Core; our department had meetings about these “revised” standards that would replace the “current” state standards of the No Child Left Behind era. By the time I resigned in the spring of 2012, our school was already thinking ahead to full implementation, testing, and using materials that would align with the CCSS.

My interest in the Common Core is directly tied to my professional interests and professional identity. I have a vested interest in the implications of the Common Core and how student learning will be impacted by this new set of standards. After considering various thesis topics last spring, several people brought the obvious to my attention: “Why don’t you write

about the Common Core?” The prompting of others, combined with my deep interest in the topic, was the impetus for this project.

For this thesis, I will be conducting a Burkean rhetorical analysis of the Common Core’s English Language Arts Standards for grades 9-12. Burkean analysis involves the examination of pairs of elements (act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose) to illuminate human motive. Detailed information regarding this method is provided in the chapter entitled “Method: Burkean Rhetorical Analysis” of this document. For this project, I will examine the motives behind writing and implementing the Common Core by analyzing the agent-purpose elements of the standards. Burke defines “agent” as being a person or people who perform an act, and purpose encompasses “why an act is performed or the reason for the act.” For my objective, the “purpose” of the Common Core will include both intended and unintended consequences of the standards, as examining all consequences will help to illuminate implicit motives behind the writing of the Common Core. In the following chapters, I will identify the agents of the Common Core and their purpose, which will be used in the rhetorical analysis chapters. After motives are revealed and discussed, I will employ postcolonial theory in the discussion chapter to examine how students might be affected by Common Core implementation. Analysis of the standards using a postcolonial lens helps to illustrate the colonizing potential of the Common Core.

Before I provide background on the Common Core and issues related to literacy, I would like to state the research question driving this study: What can a Burkean rhetorical analysis of the Common Core State Standards (English Language Arts grades 9-12), focusing on the ratio of agent-purpose, tell us about which literacies, literacy practices, and discourses are privileged in public education today? Rhetoric and Composition would be interested in the findings of this study, as the discipline is invested in issues of literacy and discourse. A large corpus of Rhetoric

and Composition scholarship focuses on the teaching of writing, which directly applies to the writing competencies called for in the CCSS. Perhaps work such as this will assist in bridging the gap between Rhetoric and Composition scholarship and pedagogy in public schools.

Because this thesis is being produced during a time of widespread Common Core implementation, this study is situated within an appropriate *kairotic* moment. In this context, I'm using Kinneavy's definition of *kairos*, which is described as the "right or opportune time to do something" (Kinneavy 80). This topic has the appropriate *kairos* for analysis, as the CCSS is currently undergoing implementation in many states. How states receive and respond to the standards remains to be seen in the coming years. Now is the opportune time to analyze these standards and critically reflect on what is potentially beneficial and potentially problematic about them. As I indicate above, critical reflection of the standards through rhetorical analysis can lead to positive change in public schools; the opportunity to engage in this kind of work exists in this *kairotic* moment. Not only does this moment in chronological time signal appropriateness, but the relationship between the subject and the situation is significant. Smith makes this distinction, calling *kairos* a "subject-situational correlation" (Smith 5). In this case, the CCSS is occurring in a specific moment in time; it may not have been possible for the standards to be written and implemented in any other historical moment. Equally important is how the Common Core is responded to during this *kairotic* moment; it is this kind of work that I hope to accomplish through this project.

The following chapter provides background information on the Common Core State Standards, situating the standards within the larger landscape and recent history of public education. This background includes references to various agents and their purpose in writing

the Common Core, and it also serves to introduce some of the elements needed for my Burkean rhetorical analysis.

BACKGROUND OF THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

To provide context for the Common Core State Standards Initiative, I situate the Common Core within the larger landscape of public education in the United States. Public education has been tied to economic interests for centuries; this is not a revolutionary or contemporary idea. For the purposes of this argument, I briefly examine the connection between public schooling and economic interests over the past three decades. This provides a historical context that sets up the impetus for the CCSS.

A NATION AT RISK

In 1983, President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education released the now well-known report entitled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. The second sentence of this document (after the introduction) makes it clear that the authors are concerned about the United States competing in the global economy: "Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world" (United States). Even this one sentence, placed at the beginning of the report, clearly illustrates that public education is being tied to economic values and interests. The report paints a grim picture regarding the state of our country's educational landscape, and the authors specifically address literacy deficiencies: "The people of the United States need to know that individuals in our society who do not possess the levels of skill, literacy, and training essential to this new era will be effectively disenfranchised, not simply from the material rewards that accompany competent performance, but also from the chance to participate fully in our national life" (United States). *A Nation at Risk* focuses heavily on skills and literacy (although the only literacies mentioned are 'basic' and 'functional') required for

economic stability and participation in public life. This document was one catalyst that inspired numerous federal, state, and local reforms in public schooling.

Another influential component during the 1980s that spurred education reform was closely tied to the workplace. There was a widespread belief that graduates entering the workforce were woefully underprepared for literate practices of the workplace. This phenomenon became known as the “literacy crisis,” and it became the impetus for new educational reforms of the 1990s.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT

In the 1990s, outcomes-based education (OBE) was adopted by many states and districts. OBE meant that states wrote their own standards, and they developed quantitative measurements to determine whether or not students knew the required content. The culmination of OBE was the federal legislative act No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), in 2001. NCLB had several purposes, one of which was to prepare all students to meet state mandated standards and participate in the workforce. NCLB’s primary focus was on skills related to reading, writing, and mathematics, which not surprisingly, are also closely associated with economic success. In fact, the subjects that are at the most risk for being eliminated from schools are those that are not perceived to prepare students for the workforce: art, music, drama, and physical education, for example. David Hursh, of the University of Rochester, indicated that “NCLB promises to increase educational and economic productivity in a globalized economy” (Hursh). The law was intended to serve as a link between school and the economy, making sure that all students would be able to meet the demands of an increasingly globalized market.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

The most recent widespread, significant change in U.S. public schooling is the creation and adoption of the Common Core State Standards. This next section will explore in-depth the Common Core to demonstrate that this document is yet another education reform closely tied to economic interests. In examining the context, creation, and background of the Common Core, it is necessary that I explain the focus of this section. I include some persons and organizations while excluding others. The reason for this selection is two-fold. First, the included list of companies, organizations, foundations, and persons fits appropriately within the scope of my project. Including the entire list of those involved would be beyond the scope of this project. It will be demonstrated that private interests, philosophies, and ideologies are directly connected to public education. Second, more has been written about certain individuals and foundations than others. This may beg the questions: “Why does the coverage of those involved in the creation of the CCSS vary so widely? Is there bias in what is being reported?” These are valid questions. Perhaps those who are involved to a great degree or those who have the largest impact are the ones who receive the most coverage. Primarily, both popular press articles and scholarly publications examine reactions regarding the involvement of certain entities in the creation of the Common Core.

BILL AND MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION

Despite the fact that influential foundations have a “history of imposing big ideas on American urban public education” which is “littered with failure,” there are several foundations that are largely affecting public education in the United States (Bloomfield). One such example is the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which has spent almost \$4 billion since 2000 in an effort to improve public high schools (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation). In the 2000s, the

Foundation attempted to “reform high schools by reorganizing them into small learning communities” (Bloomfield). Learning communities were created by breaking up large schools into smaller ones. The rationale driving this decision was that smaller schools would give students more individualized attention, leading to higher test scores. One author called the results of this measure “mixed at best” (Bloomfield). The executive director for education initiatives at the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Tom Vander Ark, indicated that these early grantmaking experiences showed “that starting new small schools is more promising than breaking up big schools into small units” (Robelen). While this is certainly not an acknowledgement of wrongdoing, it suggests that the Foundation believes this early philanthropic work was unsuccessful. In fact, the Foundation decided to try a different approach to improve public schools, which had “an emphasis on promoting state and district standards, assessments, and accountability measures” (Robelen) as well as “performance-based teacher pay, data collection, [...] and school ‘turnaround’” (Barkan). Turnaround is a term for replacing the staff of low-performing schools, replacing schools with charters, or closing schools and relocating students (Barkan). Mass Insight, the consulting firm hired to write an official guide on turnaround entitled *The Turnaround Challenge*, describes turnaround as involving three kinds of intervention: program change, people change, and conditions change (Calkins et al. 43). *The Turnaround Challenge* was created and published in 2007. During this time, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation began to invest money in their new approach, which adhered to the philosophy present in *The Turnaround Challenge*.

Perhaps their most important investment, which led to an eventual influential partnership, was with Chicago Public Schools (CPS). In January 2008, Chicago Public Schools received \$10.3 million from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, making the total amount of money

donated to the school district over \$90 million (Bowker). The money was given to The Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL), an organization “which manages CPS’s ‘turnaround’ schools and runs a teaching academy” to train teachers for Chicago’s inner-city schools (Bowker).

ARNE DUNCAN

Because the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation provided such a large sum of money to Chicago Public Schools, the Foundation’s methods for school reform became well-known to the then-CEO of Chicago Public Schools, Arne Duncan. In January 2009, President Barack Obama appointed Arne Duncan to be the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education (“Arne Duncan, U.S. Secretary of Education—Biography”). In this position, Duncan had the opportunity to implement nationwide the education vision of the Gates Foundation (Barkan). This vision includes, as aforementioned, a common set of standards, assessments, accountability measures, performance-based teacher pay, and turnaround.

RACE TO THE TOP GRANT

The U.S. Department of Education had to provide an incentive so that states would adopt these measures. In July 2009, the Department announced a multi-billion dollar (\$4.3 billion) grant entitled “Race to the Top” (RttT) in which states competed with one another for a portion of the grant money (Stotsky 1). In order to compete for the grant, states had to comply with a number of criteria outlined by the U.S. Department of Education, including the following: Great Teachers and Leaders, State Success Factors, Standards and Assessments, General Selection Criteria, Turning Around the Lowest-Achieving Schools, and Data Systems to Support Instruction (*Race to the Top Program Executive Summary*).

Despite being required to adopt these non-researched provisions, forty-six states competed in at least one round of the competition, as states were desperate for money (“Race to the Top Phase One”; “Race to the Top Phase Two”). In addition to changing their laws, states had to complete an application for the U.S. Department of Education to review. In July 2009, after Race to the Top was announced, the Gates Foundation offered to help states write their grant applications. To accomplish this, Bill Gates “sat down with lawmakers from 15 states in a conference room in Philadelphia, and [said] his foundation would give their states up to \$250,000 each” to write their grant proposals (Dillon). States who were not included in this group claimed that Gates’s selectivity was unfair (Dillon). In September 2009, the Foundation rethought its position and decided to offer \$250,000 to all states competing for money, as long as they could prove that they agreed with the Foundation’s philosophy on education (Dillon; Barkan). After proving that they agreed with the Foundation’s vision of education reform, states received money to write the application for RttT. This event illustrates the power of the Gates Foundation to shape public education.

Race to the Top was conducted in phases, each of which had several winners. Winners in the first two phases were announced in 2010 and winners in the third phase were announced in 2011. In the first phase of the process, two states (Delaware and Tennessee) won grant money (“Delaware and Tennessee Win First Race to the Top Grants”). In the second phase, nine states and the District of Columbia (Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Rhode Island) won grant money (“Nine States and the District of Columbia Win Second Round Race to the Top Grants”). In the third phase, seven states (Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania) won grant

money (“Department of Education Awards \$200 Million to Seven States to Advance K-12 Reform”).

On the Race to the Top application, one of the criteria under “Standards and Assessment” is “developing and adopting common standards” (“Phase Three Resources.”). By adding this provision, the U.S. Department of Education had the opportunity to create a set of standards that would be implemented by all states competing for the grant. The standards first had to be written, and the U.S. Department of Education distributed this task to two organizations: the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) (“Read the Common Core Standards”). Both of these organizations teamed with the organization Achieve to write the standards (“Achieving the Common Core”). The initiative was titled the Common Core State Standards Initiative.

The Gates Foundation has financially supported the organizations responsible for writing the Standards. It has donated \$21.23 million to the National Governors Association, \$25.48 million to the Council of Chief State School Officers, and \$8.84 million to Achieve (Robelen).

PURPOSE OF THE COMMON CORE

The stated purpose of the Common Core, which is expressed clearly in the document, is to make all students ready for college and careers (“Implementing the Common Core State Standards”). This stated goal also appears in an earlier document. In 2008, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation published a reflection of their investments in education from 2000-2008. In this document, the Foundation asserts that “all students deserve to graduate high school with the skills and knowledge that prepare them for college, career, and life” (“All Students Ready for College, Career, and Life: Reflections on the Foundation’s Education Investments 2000-2008”

2). The goal expressed by the Gates Foundation is the same goal that later appears in the Common Core State Standards.

SIGNIFICANT AGENTS OF THE COMMON CORE

The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) examinations are tests that align with the Common Core State Standards. As of this writing, eighteen states have agreed to implement the PARCC exam (“About PARCC”). One consulting firm involved in managing data for the PARCC exam is McKinsey and Company (“Core Talk: How Sustainable are Federally Funded Large-Scale Assessments when the Federal Funds End?”). One of McKinsey and Company’s employees, David Coleman, was recruited to help develop the standards. Coleman eventually co-founded the organization Student Achievement Partners, and its website states it was founded “by David Coleman, Susan Pimentel and Jason Zimba, lead writers of the Common Core State Standards” (“Our Purpose”). Of these three, David Coleman has received the most media attention. In fact, Coleman has been dubbed “the architect” of the Common Core by *Time*, as well as by other publications (Rotherham). He is now the President and CEO of College Board (“Our Leadership”).

COLORADO’S COMMON CORE IMPLEMENTATION

It is necessary to briefly discuss Colorado’s implementation of the Common Core because the process was unique. According to the Colorado Department of Education website, in 2008 the Colorado legislature passed Senate Bill 08-212, which was called Colorado’s Achievement Plan for Kids. It required “revision of standards and alignment of the P-12 educational system” (“Introduction to the Colorado Academic Standards”). Over the course of a year, the state updated its standards in ten content areas. The Colorado Academic Standards, as they came to be known, were adopted in 2009. Shortly thereafter, the Common Core State

Standards were released and Arne Duncan announced the Race to the Top grant. The grant was the impetus for the Colorado Department of Education to commission “a study to compare the state’s reading, writing and communicating standards and math standards with the Common Core State Standards” (“Introduction to the Colorado Academic Standards”). The findings of this study showed that both sets of standards were closely aligned, which led to Colorado adopting the Common Core for both mathematics and English Language Arts (“Introduction to the Colorado Academic Standards”).

Because the state essentially had adopted two sets of standards for mathematics and English Language Arts, Colorado decided to integrate the Common Core with the Colorado Academic Standards. In order to do this, the Colorado Department of Education tasked the non-profit WestEd with conducting a gap analysis “comparing the 2009 version of the Colorado Academic Standards in mathematics and reading, writing and communicating with the Common Core State Standards in mathematics and English language arts” (“Colorado Academic Standards: History and Development”). Their analysis “confirmed the close alignment” of both the Colorado Academic Standards and the CCSS (“Colorado Academic Standards: History and Development”). In December 2010, the Colorado Department of Education released “the Colorado Academic Standards for mathematics and reading, writing and communication incorporating the Common Core State Standards” (“Introduction to the Colorado Academic Standards”). The Colorado Department of Education’s website indicates that although the state adopted the Common Core, Colorado “continues to maintain ‘unique to Colorado’ standards” in mathematics and English Language Arts (“Introduction to the Colorado Academic Standards”). This is an unusual move, as most states adopted the Common Core to replace their previous state standards.

As previously mentioned, the stated goal of the Common Core is to prepare students for college and careers. Supporters of the Common Core claim that the document's strength lies in its economic potential. If students are prepared adequately for college and careers, they will be able to transition more easily to the workforce and will be effective, competent contributors in growing a strong, national economy. Since the standards are also supposedly internationally benchmarked, graduates of U.S. public schools should help the nation remain internationally competitive economically ("Myths vs. Facts"; "International Benchmarking"). The connection between economic interests and the Common Core, a significant measure in public education, is consistent with the national trend of the past several decades – that public education is closely tied to economic interests.

LITERACY SCHOLARSHIP

In this chapter, I discuss the connection between economic interests and literacies. Literacies are at the center of the English Language Arts standards, and student literacy is essential to meet the stated goal of the Common Core, which is to make students college and career ready (“Students Who are College and Career Ready in Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, & Language”). Students’ competency with literacies is imperative for their future success in the workplace. Therefore, literacy is an incredibly important feature of the CCSS document. If the intent of the CCSS is to produce graduates who are ready for college and the workplace, competency with various literacies is certainly an essential component of students’ preparation.

DEFINITION OF LITERACY

A definition of literacy can be described through James Gee’s conceptualization of language and social goods. According to James Gee, “social goods” encompass “anything some people in a society want and value” (*An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 5). These goods can be both material and immaterial, and they are typically negotiated through language. This makes language deeply political, and if we use language to negotiate social goods, Gee contends that they “are always at stake” (*An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 7). Because people are always competing for social goods, language is imperative for attaining what they want and need. Language is the basis of all literacies, and because language is political, literacies also carry with them social, political, and economic implications. For the purposes of this project, I will use Gee’s definition of literacy, which is: “a control of secondary uses of language” (“What is Literacy?” 542). This definition is appropriate for my thesis, as the Common Core expects

students to attain control over secondary uses of language. It also characterizes literacy as more than simply reading and writing, which is the traditional definition of literacy.

Two related terms that are useful for this project are “literacy events” and “literacy practices.” The term literacy event, originally introduced by Heath, describes “a social action going on around a piece of writing in which the writing matters to the way people interact” (Brandt and Clinton 342). This broad definition allows literacy to be situated easily within discourses. Literacy events are social activities in which people interacting within a discourse are invested. A literacy practice is a more abstract concept, which has been discussed by a number of theorists. Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton offer Brian Street’s definition, which indicates that a literacy practice is “usually treated as the socially regulated, recurrent, and patterned things that people do with literacy as well as the cultural significance they ascribe to those doings” (as cited in Brandt and Clinton, 202, p. 342). Significant terms in this definition are “patterned things” and “cultural significance.” In order for a literacy practice to exist, it must involve the repetition of literacy events; those patterns of literacy must also be culturally relevant or important to the members of the social network.

This definition emphasizes the social aspect of literacy, which is an essential component of a discourse. Barton and Hamilton agree with conceptualizing literacy practices as existing in “relations between people, within groups and communities rather than as a set of properties residing in individuals” (Barton and Hamilton 8). The usefulness of literacy practices, Barton and Hamilton assert, is they provide a way of understanding the connection between the acts of reading and writing and how these activities shape and are embedded in social structures (Barton and Hamilton 7). It must be noted that literacy practices are not observable, since they involve that which cannot be seen – values, beliefs, feelings, and attitudes (Barton and Hamilton 7). The

existence of literacy practices in schools, then, is powerful in contributing to the continuation of a discourse. However, since literacy practices cannot be seen, they will most likely appear invisible or non-existent to those who observe classroom behavior.

Now that definitions of literacy, literacy events, and literacy practices have been established, the next section includes a definition of discourse. Defining discourse here is necessary, as it describes language use, patterns of thinking, and patterns of behavior as occurring within broad social contexts. In this way, it builds on the provided definition of literacy. Additionally, a definition of discourse is needed because my research question asks which discourses are privileged in public schooling.

DEFINITION OF DISCOURSE

I use Gee's concept of discourse in my research question, asking which discourses are privileged in public education today. According to Gee, a discourse is "a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or 'social network'" ("What is Literacy?" 537). This definition contains three premises. First, discourses are described as being socially situated. Discourses occur within social contexts comprised of a group, or multiple groups, of people. Second, discourses use language, thinking, and acting with a common set of agreed upon rules or standards. In order for discourses to function in social contexts, socially determined standards must be exercised. Third, discourses allow members to identify with the group at large. By properly using the socially determined standards, individuals can become enculturated into the discourse and identify with other members of the social network.

This definition of discourse is appropriate for my thesis because it addresses specific characteristics relevant to my argument. Schools are powerful sites of discourse creation,

regulation, and transmission because they are able to set socially acceptable standards that students, who learn in a social environment, are required to adopt in order to be successful. Furthermore, “institutional discourses do not *exist* in abstract terms alone but are *enacted* in interactional terms as participants jointly attend to reflecting and creating the context of their situation” (Barton 410). Because discourses depend on the interaction of participants, discourses carry with them particular values and attitudes. In this way, discourses are political and embody particular ideologies that are communicated by members of the discourse. Since schools create, regulate, and transmit discourses, they are highly political entities.

Particular literacies and literacy practices maintain and perpetuate discourses. The rest of this chapter is devoted to explicating theory on literacy and how literacy functions in certain contexts.

CHARACTERIZATIONS OF LITERACY

LITERACY IS SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED

One characterization of literacy is that it is socially constructed (Barton 408; Barton and Hamilton 7; “Critical Literacy at Work” 650). This means literacy is situated in social contexts rather than existing solely in the minds of individuals. Social activities related to literacy include reading and discussing texts, holding certain attitudes and values about texts, and interacting with others around texts (“Critical Literacy at Work” 650). This characterization of literacy emphasizes “social, institutional, and cultural relationships” instead of conceptualizing these activities as “decontextualized or neutral skills or purely psychological processes” (“Critical Literacy at Work” 650). If we consider literacy to be socially constructed, it places authority and responsibility on the group participating in literate activities, rather than only on the individual.

This view of literacy also supports the idea that “illiterate” individuals are not cognitively or intellectually deficient. Rather, most likely they are not familiar with certain literacy practices in particular social contexts. However, people can learn literacies and literacy practices through experience (as long as other factors are accounted for, such as occasion, access, and materials), if they wish to enter a new discourse. Not only are literacies socially constructed, they also do not have “a set of functions independent of the social meanings with which [a text] is imbued” (Barton and Hamilton 12). This claim suggests that texts only have meaning within social contexts, which implies that texts are meaningless without occurring within social situations. This makes sense, given that language is political and all communicative exchanges (whether oral or written) occur within social contexts.

LITERACY IS CONTEXT DEPENDENT

In addition to characterizing literacies as being socially constructed, we can describe them as being dependent on specific contexts. Brandt explains that if we want to share meaning with others, “we must establish a shared context or setting through which that meaning can be understood” (“Social Foundations of Reading and Writing” 118). Meaning can only be constructed within a shared context because socially constructed materials (literacies) are embedded within social environments. Barton elaborates on this point by citing Lunsford, Moglen, and Slevin’s “call for research on ‘how inextricably embedded literacy is in culture, how context-dependent is its realization...in the literacy practices of communities, schools, and workplaces’” (Barton 408). If we consider literacies to be context dependent, they will not be viewed as universal, transferrable skills. This understanding could greatly affect the ways in which literacies are taught in schools and used in the workplace. For example, Gee discusses a possible reason why some students are more successful in school than others. He compares

formal and informal contexts, asserting: “In the more ‘formal’ cases, it is held that the words and sentences mean in a more explicit, less contextual way” (*An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 51). In these cases, we might call this language “decontextualized” (*An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 51). According to Gee, “Some people in education claim that what many minority and lower class socioeconomic children who do not succeed in school fail to know is how to use such ‘decontextualized language’” (*An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 51).

The implications of this suggest that students in lower socioeconomic groups are at a disadvantage because their primary literacy practices do not use language in explicit, less contextual ways. In turn, this can negatively impact their ability to enter certain discourses and eventually benefit from them. Although literacies are context dependent, we do have agency in changing existing literacies and discourses. Brandt discusses accounts of individuals appropriating literacy in order to divert and subvert literacy’s history (“Sponsors of Literacy” 182). Changes in an individual’s literacy activities, she indicates, can lead to larger transformations in a community (“Sponsors of Literacy” 182). This sense of agency allows individuals to use literacy to empower themselves and shape the world around them.

LITERACY PERPETUATES POWER STRUCTURES

There are some individuals, groups, or entities that may regulate, support, teach, or suppress literacy for their own benefit. In a similar fashion, Hull quotes Simon as indicating that “particular activities, characteristics, and performances” are labeled “skills” which “are believed to accomplish particular purposes, to serve certain ends, or to promote special interests” usually of those in positions of power (“Hearing Other Voices” 18). In these cases, literacies occur within institutions or institutional settings where they are used to benefit the special interests of those in privileged positions. While ordinary people might benefit from their literate capabilities,

many times these capabilities are used to benefit institutions at large. Barton supports this assertion by stating that literacy's role is to manage interactions and maintain power relations (Barton 411). Because institutions compete with one another for dominance, the literacy practices used to maintain power are affected. As "institutions fight [one another] for economic and ideological position" a person's literacy learning, which encompasses "its occasions, materials, applications, [and] potential" follows transformations occurring within the sponsoring institutions ("Sponsors of Literacy" 177). Therefore, people's literacy activities are closely tied to institutional changes and serve to uphold institutions' political positioning. We can also deduce that "literacy is not a neutral skill" and involves much more than "decontextualized decoding, comprehension, and production skills" ("Hearing Other Voices" 19).

Literacy also encompasses "what is expressed or assumed within contextual and ideological systems" (Barton 409, 410). Literacy extends far beyond the abilities to read or write, as literacy is ideological and is used to perpetuate institutional power structures. When literacies are taught in schools, for instance, the literacies themselves are never neutral. They exist within ideological structures to perpetuate power for certain people or institutions. Students' literate activities are being used to serve the economic interests of those who are in privileged positions and make decisions about literacy practices. Conversely, I would argue that literacies also serve to disempower certain people or groups who have limited access (materials and technologies included) to particular literacies or who do not stand to benefit from them.

Literacy is so embedded in power relations that "literacy cannot be abstracted from the language of [power]" ("Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference" 3). Therefore, literacy must be defined in "political and ethical terms" ("Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference" 3). It is political because how we interpret the world is imbued in power relations; it

is ethical because people interpret the world differently based on “class, gender, race, politics, and sexual orientation” (“Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference” 3). When we begin to see literacy tied to politics and ethics, it becomes much more than an abstract set of universal skills. It becomes a transmitter of ideology that is defined by difference. Literacy is contingent upon our views of the world, which are based on our particular positionalities. Difference is essential to this definition. If literacy is defined “in monolithic terms [...] within a linear logic that erases uncertainty” then it only “recognizes the borders of privilege and domination” (“Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference” 2). Difference, on the other hand, challenges privileged, dominant, hegemonic notions of literacy as a monolithic entity. Difference has the ability to redefine traditional notions of literacy, which could impact people’s access to literacies and the actions of those who regulate literacies. If we conceive of literacy in this way, not as a set of finite skills but as a set of patterned practices defined by difference and occurring within institutional power structures, then the relationship between literacy and power structures is complicated.

Literacy is “one of the means by which educational privilege [...] remains unequally distributed in contemporary society” (Barton 408). It is also, according to Linda Brodkey, “confounded by race and gender” (qtd. in Barton 408). This suggests literacy is stratified based on one’s educational access and opportunities. This, in turn, can lead to social and economic hierarchies, as social goods are often tied to educational privilege. Those who have higher engagement with economically valuable literacy practices are usually members of the dominant culture and race. Conversely, “a large number of those who are illiterate are also members of minorities and constitute what is called the underclass” (Purves 2). Minorities and people from low-caste racial groups are typically disadvantaged when trying to acquire literacies and literacy

practices that will benefit them economically. However, literacy can become a source of agency for those who acquire it. It can function as “a form of ideology critique that makes visible how oppressive and dominating practices mediate between the margins and center of power” (“Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference” 2). In this way, literacy can be considered an “emancipatory practice” with the goal of transforming “material relations of domination” and abolishing “oppressive regimes” (“Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference” 2). Literacy is one way to empower marginalized and Othered groups to challenge oppressive, dominant power structures.

One example of institutions that function as a dominant power structure is public schools. Public schools are powerful in that they “produce knowledge” and provide students “with a sense of place, worth, and identity” (“Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference” 7). To accomplish this, they offer students “selected representations, skills, social relations, and values that presuppose particular histories and ways of being in the world” (“Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference” 7). Students’ attainment of skills, social relations, and values illustrates that schools are political, rather than neutral, institutions (“Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference” 7). As explained earlier, schools are also powerful transmitters of literacy, as literacy is closely tied to economic interests. Because schools are power structures that transmit certain literacies (because of their perceived value), some “literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others” (Barton and Hamilton 8). Some literacies, on the other hand, are non-dominant or completely invisible in the classroom. Therefore, the literacies that schools choose to support and transmit are privileged, while literacies that remain invisible in schools are marginalized or Othered. Schools are institutions that “tend to support dominant literacy practices” (Barton and Hamilton 12). We can infer that these dominant literacy practices are also

hegemonic. Hegemonic discourse in U.S. public schools is typically Western and patriarchal, as it has been shaped historically by ideologies that privilege Western constructions (Western literature, Western authors, and Western rhetoric) and patriarchal structures. Rhetorical analysis of the Common Core State Standards will reveal to what degree dominant, hegemonic literacies are being perpetuated through implementation of the document.

If schools continue to inscribe students into dominant literacies, as Barton and Hamilton argue, the students whose home discourses are privileged in schools will have a higher chance of succeeding academically, and students whose home discourses are not privileged in schools will be less likely to succeed. If schools begin to think about literacy differently and use it as a liberating force, rather than as another gatekeeper to success, literacy can “offer students the opportunity to raise questions about how the categories of race, class, and gender are shaped within the margins and center of power” so students may understand in new ways how they can “reclaim power and identity” (“Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference” 9). In this way, schools can function as sites of liberation for students whose literacies are currently not being privileged in public schools.

MISCONCEPTIONS ASSOCIATED WITH LITERACY

Unfortunately, those who have a great deal of influence in regulating literacy do not necessarily have formal training with literacy. This lack of training has led to many misconceptions associated with literacy. One misconception that Glynda Hull provides is a characterization of literate skills as “abstract competencies [that are] represented as context-free and universal” (“Hearing Other Voices” 17). Hull expands on this idea by describing literacy as a “unitary phenomenon” (“Hearing Other Voices” 17). With traditional definitions of literacy, it is easy to think of reading and writing as universal and transferrable to all contexts. Hull provides a

fitting comparison, indicating that if we think of reading and writing as the “equivalent of all-purpose flour” then literate skills can be transferred to any context (“Hearing Other Voices” 17). However, literacy research over the past few decades suggests that literacy use is always contextual. Reading and writing are not necessarily generic, universal skills that can transfer to all situations. Rather, the processes of reading and writing are different depending on the context, which means that each workplace environment requires context-specific literacy to be acquired.

Another problematic misconception is that workplace literacy focuses on both “basic” and “higher order” thinking skills that workers lack (“Hearing Other Voices” 17). The concern that workers lack literacy skills has been a topic of discussion for several decades. In the 1980s, Alan Purves specifies that there was “a worldwide cry to eliminate illiteracy in all corners of the globe” (Purves 1). Perhaps this desire was well intentioned, but it was also probably misinformed. In the United States, there was “consensus among employers, government officials, and literacy providers that American workers to a disturbing extent are ‘illiterate’” and “that higher levels of literacy are increasingly needed for many types of work” (“Hearing Other Voices” 4). While it is true that many workplaces depend on new literacies, such as computer and digital literacies, it is an overstatement to assert that American workers are alarmingly illiterate. Workers most likely need training on how to use certain literacies within particular workplace contexts.

When illiteracy is described this way, it sounds like an epidemic that can and should be cured. This, of course, implies that the “cure” for illiteracy is universal, which is consistent with the traditional belief that reading and writing are also universal and transferrable. Purves elaborates on this idea, explaining that such characterizations of illiteracy “are couched in terms that make it sound like a disease that can be cured once and for all. The various proponents of

literacy campaigns use medical terminology” (Purves 1). The implication is that illiteracy can be eradicated, like a disease, so that workplaces can function more efficiently. Purves also indicates that proponents use economic terminology to argue that illiteracy among adults in the U.S. costs “several billion dollars a year in lost productivity, prison and welfare costs, and adult training” (Purves 1). Here, not only is illiteracy connected to a loss of work productivity, but it is also curiously connected to incarceration. When illiteracy is characterized in these terms, it is easy to see why government officials and employers want to focus on improving literacy rates among students and workers. Hull argues that these negative characterizations of illiteracy and workplace literacy describe workers “as deficient” and are ultimately “inaccurate, incomplete, and misleading” (“Hearing Other Voices” 4). When workers are characterized in this way, as lacking literacy skills, they “can be held accountable for our country’s lagging economy and the failure of its businesses to compete at home and internationally” (“Hearing Other Voices” 4). When workers are held responsible for these consequences, they become “convenient scapegoats for problems which originate in a larger arena” (“Hearing Other Voices” 13). Workers might be convenient scapegoats, but problems that they are being held accountable for extend much farther than their “illiteracy.”

The last misconception I would like to briefly mention is that of the “literacy myth.” According to Hull’s characterization of Harvey Graff, the literacy myth is “the tendency to associate the value of reading and writing with socioeconomic development and individual growth” (“Hearing Other Voices” 11). In other words, we tend to correlate socioeconomic success with achievement in literacy. However, Purves challenges this correlation by asking: “Why should the fact that a large number of people can barely read or write be so closely tied to the prosperity of an industrialized and thereby urbanized global market economy” (Purves 1)?

The correlation between socioeconomic success and achievement in literacy does not necessarily exist, which means that literacy has been mistakenly identified as a precursor to economic success.

However, I do not want to suggest that literacy is unimportant or cannot be linked in any way to economic success. Surely, competency with literacies does impact one's success in certain workplace contexts. In fact, Shirley Brice Heath's study of two southeastern towns in the U.S., "Roadville" and "Trackton," reveal that school-based literacies and workplace literacies intersected for residents. She indicates that as children, townspeople learned particular habits and values in school regarding reading, writing, and speaking (Heath 262). Then in adulthood, they engaged in familiar tasks regarding literacy and were successful in the workplace (Heath 262). The townspeople found these norms, values, and habits with literacy practices to be institutionalized in contexts other than the classroom (Heath 262). In this case, the townspeople's literacy practices in school intersected with literacy practices in the workplace, increasing their success. While this study effectively illustrates how literacy functions for the townspeople in a particular historical moment, the misconception regarding the "literacy myth" applies to literacy practices writ large. The literacy myth addresses the assumption that literacy will automatically lead to economic, social, or political success, which is a correlation that does not seem to be supported by research.

SPONSORS OF LITERACY

As stated earlier, I use Gee's definition of literacy, which is: "a control of secondary uses of language" ("What is Literacy?" 542). Learning secondary uses of language can be facilitated by what Deborah Brandt calls "sponsors of literacy." Sponsors of literacy are "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate,

suppress, or withhold literacy – and gain advantage by it in some way” (“Sponsors of Literacy” 166). The definition is broad, encompassing the many roles that literacy sponsors can have.

Ultimately, according to Brandt, literacy sponsors benefit from their participation with literacy.

Literacy sponsors exist in many environments and contexts, some of which include the workplace, government meetings, the entertainment industry, the home, and schools. For my purposes, it will be particularly useful to consider how literacy sponsors function in schools and in the workplace. Important literacy sponsors connected to the Common Core are those who designed the document, since their conception of literacy will be the backbone of English Language Arts instruction in nearly all states (excluding Alaska, Nebraska, Texas, and Virginia). This regulation of literacy is not politically neutral, in the same way that language itself is not politically neutral. Because literacy sponsors have a political agenda in their engagement with literacy, there has been increased competition “to manage, measure, teach, and exploit it” (“Sponsors of Literacy” 169). This competition largely determines how individuals engage with literacy (“Sponsors of Literacy” 169), which gives literacy sponsors a significant amount of authority in influencing literacy practices. Because literacy sponsors hold so much influence, Brandt suggests that we be cognizant of whom or what endorses literacy learning and use (“Sponsors of Literacy” 166). This awareness can help to reveal which entities have authority as literacy sponsors, how they impact literacy occasions and events, and how they might benefit from their involvement with literacy as a sponsor.

In the 20th century workplace, employers acting as literacy sponsors discovered ways to exploit reading and writing for commercial gain (“Sponsors of Literacy” 168). Because literacy has been commodified in this way, it has been sponsored heavily by both workplaces and schools. Workplaces have viewed literacy as a series of skills that must be acquired for

employees to function effectively in the workplace. Because literacy is required in most workplaces, it “looms as one of the great engines of profit and competitive advantage in the 20th century” (“Sponsors of Literacy” 166). Literacy is used as a resource by employers to remain competitive in both domestic and international markets, and because of its value, it is “a key resource in gaining profit and edge” (“Sponsors of Literacy” 169). In this case, employers use employees’ literate skills to increase profit; the employees’ competency with literacy needs to adapt to new literate demands in order to retain employment. This means many individuals are vulnerable in regards to their own “economic value” because standards of literacy in the workplace are consistently increasing (“Sponsors of Literacy” 166).

Brandt indicates that this gap in expectation is what we call “the rising standard of literacy” (“Sponsors of Literacy” 178). The rising standard of literacy suggests that workers consistently need to become familiar with new literacies or gain new literate skills because change happens so rapidly. It is this phenomenon that “makes today’s literacy feel so advanced and, at the same time, so destabilized” (“Sponsors of Literacy” 178). The expectation that workers should be well versed in “advanced literacies” is currently popular, even though this leaves workers vulnerable to the changing valued literacies of the workplace.

SCHOOL AND WORKPLACE LITERACIES

This discussion on workplace literacy helps to conceptualize the stated goal of the Common Core, which is to make students college and career ready. This topic also necessitates a discussion about school literacy and its connection to the workplace and society. According to Anne Gere, literacy’s economic function links schooling to the marketplace (Gere 286). Therefore, literacies learned in schools theoretically have economic value. This supports the idea that the Common Core is an economically driven measure, as the literacies emphasized in the

document are intended to prepare students for their future careers. Since literacy practices are so closely tied to economic conditions, the types of literacies taught in schools are intended to prepare students for their futures in the workforce. Public schools, then, are powerful sites of literacy development and transmission. However, literacies learned in school are not the exact same literacies learned in adulthood and in the workplace. Hull points out that “there are other literate traditions besides school-based ones, and that these promote different practices with print” (“Hearing Other Voices” 14).

One difference between these literacies can be described by their functions. School-based literacy is primarily “reading to know” whereas workplace literacy is typically “reading to do” (“Critical Literacy at Work” 649). In the same article, Resnick’s similar characterization calls school-based literacy “informational literacy” and workplace or home literacy “useful literacy” or “practical literacy” (as cited in “Critical Literacy at Work,” 2000, p. 649) This differentiation is significant because it implies that literacy is not a blanket term; rather, literacies are shown to function in different ways in different contexts. Since school literacy has a different function than workplace literacy, however, I wonder how well school literacies prepare students for workplace literacies. This question is particularly important, given that the writers of the Common Core assume school-based literacies will prepare students for college and careers. Interestingly, school-based literacies operate in what Giroux and McLaren call “the conservative discourse of schooling” (as cited in “Hearing Other Voices,” 1997, p. 5). Using this characterization, public schools are defined as “agents of social discipline and economic regulation” (as cited in “Hearing Other Voices,” 1997, p. 5), being valued only insofar as they turn out workers with the skills, knowledge, habits, and attitudes thought essential in terms of

today's economy" ("Hearing Other Voices" 5). This suggests that the value of public schools lies in their ability to produce effective workers, which has clear economic implications.

Deborah Brandt's article "Sponsors of Literacy" discusses literacy's connections to the workplace at length. Brandt provides an example of print apprentices, whose reading and writing skills "existed [...] contingently within an economic moment" ("Sponsors of Literacy" 555). Literacy demands change as the economy changes, which impacts public education significantly. Schools modify their literacy practices and requirements over time based on emerging economic needs and interests. This means that literacy exists contingently with economic interests, placing it at the center of economic prosperity. Because it is a centerpiece of economic growth and stability, literacy is used as a commodity in the workplace. Those who have mastered literacies valued in the workplace have a significant advantage over those who have not mastered those literacies.

School-based and workplace-based literacies also have the potential to perpetuate inequalities. Brandt argues that even with "democracy in educational chances, stratification of opportunity continues to organize access and reward in literacy learning" ("Sponsors of Literacy" 169). Those who possess certain literacies are in better positions to gain access to social, economic, and political capital. This suggests that literacy does play an essential role in both increasing opportunity and access for those who acquire certain literacies; necessarily, it also suggests that those who do not acquire certain literacies have fewer opportunities and access to social goods. Gee elaborates on this point, suggesting that different levels of access to social goods "is a root source of inequality in society" (*An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 30). This inequality cannot be attributed entirely to concerns with literacy, but literacy is a powerful tool that advantages some people in obtaining social capital. Some people are well positioned,

especially those who are a part of the dominant culture or who are middle-class, to learn and engage in certain literacy practices that will benefit them economically.

The practice of indoctrinating children into such literacies for the purpose of economic mobility is what Gee calls the “cultivated model.” This model is “deeply connected to success in school and to some aspects of success in society, at least at the level of income and higher-status jobs” (*An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 87). While it is true that some people who do not follow the cultivated model do obtain high levels of income and higher-status jobs, those who are familiar with certain literacies will likely have more economic mobility. It is problematic that individuals who do not participate in certain literacy practices are less likely to have access to higher social mobility, which increases inequality for certain groups. Brandt explains that different social classes have different levels of access to powerful literacy sponsors, which in turn provide more opportunities for those who have greater access. Affluent people, for example, “from high-caste racial groups have multiple and redundant contacts with powerful literacy sponsors as a routine part of their economic and political privileges” (“Sponsors of Literacy” 170). This provides high-caste racial groups several advantages when they seek social, political, and economic capital. On the other hand, “poor people and those from low-caste racial groups have less consistent, less politically secured access to literacy sponsors” (“Sponsors of Literacy” 170).

Both of the aforementioned groups have different degrees of access to literacy sponsors, which affects their ability to gain upward economic mobility and social goods. The different levels of access effectively, even if unintentionally, perpetuate inequality among social classes. As this inequality increases, many workers filling jobs will be those who are part of low-caste racial groups, those who are poor, and those who are part of minority groups. As this shift

continues, where “workers increasingly are minorities, women, and immigrants [...] the tendency to view as deficient, different, and separate those who are not or do not appear to be conventionally literate is likely to grow” (“Hearing Other Voices” 14). If Hull’s prediction is correct, the misconception that workers are simply “illiterate” will likely continue to be propagated.

Even if all workers were considered literate by standards in today’s workplaces, literacy would not cure all problems that workers have in performing their job responsibilities. Regarding this topic, Hull quotes Graff as saying: “Literacy is neither the major problem, nor is it the main solution” (“Hearing Other Voices” 13). Hull continues by arguing that instead of putting great faith in literacy, we should value workers’ abilities, especially non-traditional and blue-collar workers (*Hearing Other Voices* 9). When illiteracy is portrayed as being the problem with today’s workplaces, and literacy is depicted as being the cure, this narrative “underestimate[s] and devalue[s] human potential and [...] mis-characterize[s] literacy as a curative for problems that literacy alone cannot solve” (*Hearing Other Voices* 9). While competency with certain literacies is essential for workplaces to operate, literacy will not solve all of the perceived deficiencies of workers. Hull’s suggestion that we value workers’ other attributes and abilities would probably help to bridge the gap between workers’ perceived deficiencies and improving their performance, which would benefit both the worker and the employer. If Scribner and Cole are correct in asserting that “literacy makes some difference to some skills in some contexts,” workplaces should not have faith that literacy will solve all of their problems (as cited in “Hearing Other Voices,” 1997, p. 11).

As workplaces move to introducing new literacies, workplaces should “think of these new capabilities not as isolated intellectual skills, but as constructed practices which draw their

meaning from social components of work and communities of workers” (*Hearing Other Voices* 23). This way of conceptualizing literate capabilities, as being socially constructed and relying on context, is democratic in its treatment of literacies and workers. Additionally, this conceptualization privileges the notion that literacies are context dependent and are not sets of finite, universal skills that once acquired are transferrable to any context.

METHOD: BURKEAN RHETORICAL ANALYSIS

This study uses rhetorical analysis as its methodology to illuminate implicit meanings in the CCSS and problematize the motive provided in the document's Anchor Standards. Rhetorical analysis is an appropriate method for this study because it provides a useful tool for contextualizing the standards in the current climate of public education. This kind of contextualization provides the reader with a more holistic understanding of the document's intent and potential implications. By illuminating possible implications, both the author and the reader are positioned to instigate change, if change is deemed necessary. The first step for this kind of change, within the realm of public schooling, must begin with critical thinking regarding current educational reform measures such as the CCSS.

SAMPLE SELECTION

I will analyze a portion of the CCSS, as analyzing the entire document lies outside the scope of my argument. Specifically, I will examine the English Language Arts standards for grades 9-12. There are four competencies for these grades: reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. I chose these grades and content area for several reasons. First, my professional background consists of teaching Language Arts to grades 10 and 11, and my current teaching license is Language Arts for grades 7-12. My professional training and experience gives me the appropriate background to explore thoroughly these standards for grades 9-12. My subsequent preparation in a Masters program for Rhetoric and Composition prepared me to undertake a contextualization of the Common Core within larger rhetorical goals.

The CCSS contains two "bands" for grades 9-12 with each band indicating what students should know and be able to do at the end of each band. One band includes grades 9 and 10, and

the other band includes grades 11 and 12. This means that I will examine two sets of data, as there are two bands for grades 9-12. Analyzing two sets of data is manageable for the scope of this endeavor.

The CCSS for grades 9-12 contains four strands: reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. These strands serve an organizational function; they each contain the competencies that students need to attain by the end of each grade band (9 and 10 or 11 and 12). Reading is the only strand that contains multiple categories of competencies for grades 9-12. Reading is divided into literature and informational texts. Below, I list which standards I have chosen to rhetorically analyze in the next chapters. I chose a total of twelve standards, which is manageable but not overwhelming for this task. This number provides enough information for me to make definitive statements about the CCSS's stated purpose, as well as any implicit motives. The number of standards from each strand are as follows: one in reading literature; two in reading informational text; four in writing; two in speaking and listening; three in language. I wanted to select an equal, or near-equal, number of standards from each strand. Two strands, reading and language, each had three standards chosen from them to analyze. I chose four standards from writing and two from speaking and listening. Writing is the lengthiest strand, which warrants its additional examination. I also wanted to focus on writing standards because of my interest in writing pedagogy. Seven of the twelve standards are from the 11-12 band, while five standards are from the 9-10 band. This is also a near-equal proportion. Including more standards from the 11-12 band is appropriate, however, since this is the band directly before high school graduation; we can see clearly what students are expected to know directly before entering colleges and careers.

I chose the twelve standards for three reasons. First, I examined the tasks being required of students in each strand and attempted to choose the most diverse ones in order to analyze a wide range of standards. Instead of choosing six standards that revolved around analyzing text and supporting the analysis with textual evidence, I chose standards that reflect the wide range of tasks asked of students. Where there is a 9-10 standard in the CCSS document, there is a corresponding 11-12 standard. In the rhetorical analysis chapters, I will share the wording of the corresponding standard I chose not to analyze. Almost all of the 9-10 standards are closely worded to the 11-12 standards, or sometimes they appear verbatim. In the cases where the wording is not verbatim, I typically chose the 11-12 standard, since it requires a more advanced task. Second, I chose standards that reflected several literacy practices and privileged certain literacies, as these standards will be very useful in helping me to answer my research question. Third, I chose these standards because they are representative of the main ideas expressed throughout the CCSS. Since the statements chosen are representative of the entire CCSS, the rhetorical analysis may be fairly extrapolated to the entire document. To the best of my knowledge, these statements do not unfairly characterize or misrepresent the stated purpose of the CCSS.

The following twelve standards, which will be rhetorically analyzed in the following chapters, contain a code descriptor. These descriptors are used throughout the CCSS document, and here is an explanation of each component:

CCSS: Common Core State Standards
ELA-Literacy: English Language Arts Literacy
RL: Reading, Literature
RI: Reading, Informational Text
W: Writing
SL: Speaking & Language
L: Language
9-10: grades 9 and 10

11-12: grades 11 and 12

Numbers 1–9 that appear at the end of each code: the order of the standard in each strand a-f are included for substandards of main standards; they provide additional requirements for the main standard

- 1.) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- 2.) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.5 Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.
- 3.) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.9 Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (e.g., Washington’s Farewell Address, the Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms speech, King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail”), including how they address related themes and concepts.
- 4.) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
- 5.) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.
- 6.) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.
- 7.) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8 Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and

limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.

- 8.) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- 9.) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.
- 10.) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- 11.) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.
- 12.) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.6 Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

In addition to the above standards, I will draw from information located in other portions of the CCSS document, but I will not be rhetorically analyzing them. I will simply use them to provide context, to serve as referents, and to supply necessary information for the analysis. These sections include but are not limited to the following: “Introduction,” “Standard 10: Range, Quality, & Complexity,” and “English Language Arts Standards Home.” I will also use some information from the Colorado Sample Curriculum to supplement this analysis, as the sample curriculum provides concrete suggestions for using the standards in classrooms.

BURKE’S DRAMATISTIC METHOD

To conduct my rhetorical analysis, I will use the framework of Burke’s dramatic method, which is one way of examining rhetorical effectiveness. Burke makes a distinction between “action” and “sheer motion,” asserting that “‘action’ is a term for the kind of behavior possible to a typically symbol-using animal (such as man) in contrast with the extrasymbolic or nonsymbolic operations of nature” (Burke 53). The difference between humans and nature, as Burke differentiates it, is humans’ capability to use symbols and nature’s inability to use them. He continues to say that “language is primarily a species of action” and allows humans to differentiate between symbols and what is symbolized (Burke 53). For example, the word “tree” is a symbol for the actual *thing* tree (Burke 53). Because humans are the only beings (that we know of) who can assign meaning to referents through language, humans are the only beings whose actions can be characterized as “action.” Burke provides three propositions for showing the relationship between “action” and “sheer motion”: action cannot exist without motion; motion can exist without action; and action cannot be reduced to terms of motion (Burke 53, 54). All three of these propositions suggest that humans can behave beyond “sheer motion,” or instinct, because of our use of symbols through language. Burke emphasizes this point by

arguing: “man is defined literally as an animal characterized by his special aptitude for ‘symbolic action’” (Burke 55). Symbols give meaning to things beyond their natural existence. Humans, with their unique ability to create and use symbols, assign meaning to things and interpret the world through symbol-use.

Burke claims that “language is a species of action, symbolic action – and its nature is such that it can be used as a tool” (Burke 69). Using language as a tool to assign meaning to the world suggests that language is political. The political nature of language allows humans to organize and categorize information in specific ways. Because humans are “moved by a sense of order” we have a tendency to organize symbols hierarchically (Burke 69). Using hierarchies is the best way (that we know of) to organize symbols, and we do so through the use of language. Through our hierarchical organization of symbols, we can begin to have control over the world, rather than the world having control over us.

Burke’s definition of humans includes a clause saying that we are “rotten with perfection” (Burke 70). Burke explains this clause, indicating: “there is a principle of perfection implicit in the nature of symbol systems; and in keeping with his nature as symbol-using animal, man is moved by this principle” (Burke 71). Essentially, humans want their symbols to be perfect, even though they cannot be. Because symbols refer to objects or ideas, symbols cannot fully represent referents; symbols are always imperfect representations. The word “tree,” for example, will never fully represent an actual tree – the word “tree” is simply a symbolic substitute for that which is real. Humans are in a constant struggle to achieve perfect symbols, but it will never happen.

Understanding Burke’s conceptualization of symbols is imperative in understanding how rhetoric functions in his dramatistic method. Burke indicates that humans, through using

different symbols, see the world differently. He describes this difference with an analogy – “the same ‘dream’ will be subjected to a different color filters, with corresponding differences in the nature of the event as perceived, recorded, and interpreted” (Burke 116). These different ways of viewing the world are what Burke calls “terministic screens” (Burke 115). Terministic screens are the lenses that we use to look at the world; they are the frames with which we interpret everything around us. Most of reality is constituted through symbol systems (Burke 58), and terministic screens affect the versions of reality that we create.

Rhetoric, then, is the process in which humans attempt to have other people see the world through their terministic screens. Limitations to this attempt include *reflection*, *selection*, and *deflection* (Burke 115), all processes that constrain the scope of our realities. Humans are always in competition with one another with the goal of convincing everyone else that their own symbol systems are the “best” or “correct” ones. Because humans are always striving for (unattainable) perfection, and because they compete with others over which symbol system is “better,” they need language to engage in these activities. In this situation, Burke characterizes “the nature of language as motive” (Burke 70). Language provides motive to people so they can engage in competition over symbol systems. In this case, symbols drive us to action in some way. Even though humans compete with one another to adopt particular terministic screens, these competitions are always flawed attempts.

We create reality through symbols that motivate us to act, since symbols compel us to act in certain ways. Burke’s dramatisic method is useful for examining human motive. According to Burke, dramatisic means “stressing language as an aspect of ‘action,’ that is, as ‘symbolic action’” (Burke 114). This quote illustrates the link between language and action, which is imperative for motive. Once motive becomes a part of the conversation, dramatism allows us to

investigate stories. The dramatistic method, then, is defined as “a method of analysis and a corresponding critique of terminology designed to show that the most direct route to the study of human relations and human motives is via a methodical inquiry into cycles or clusters of terms and their functions” (Burke 135). In other words, the dramatistic method helps us to identify human motives. After identification, we can analyze and predict motives. To connect this idea to what was previously stated, we could say: that which is rhetorical makes people want to act in a way that fits with one’s motives. Additionally, terministic screens determine motives for actions. The dramatistic method looks at an event through a particular terministic screen and asks: what are the most important elements of this story (Burke 152)? Burke identifies five elements as being central to any situation, event, or story. These five elements – act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose – collectively are called the dramatistic pentad (Burke 135). The act is what is happening, as well as how the action is characterized (Burke 139). The scene is where and when an act happens (Burke 139). The agent is the person performing the act (Burke 139). Agency is how an agent performs the act; the means; or the tools used (Burke 139). Purpose is why an act is performed or the reason for the act (Burke 139). The dramatistic method allows us to examine relationships between two elements, such as “scene-act” or “agent-agency.” These relationships are called ratios (Burke 136), and analyzing ratios is useful in illuminating motives.

Words are not value neutral; they are always political. When we use language, our persuasiveness is not based solely on the words we use but rather on how our words connect with other words and ideologies. Words are always connected to and implicated with other terms. An example would be the word “technology.” The word “technology” is always connected to other words and ideas, such as class, imperialism, and literacy. Specific words that are used within the context of a rhetorical situation are important because they are key in determining motive. An

effective rhetorician will decipher an existing symbol system, create an argument, and make the argument fit the original symbol system so it will be accepted. I believe this is precisely what the Common Core authors successfully accomplished. They have repackaged old ideas and marketed the document in such a way that readers believe the Common Core matches their own symbol system.

Using the dramatistic method for this study establishes an approach to language analysis that helps to illuminate the Common Core's biases and tensions that are worthy of examination. There are two reasons why this particular method of rhetorical analysis is appropriate for this project. First, Burke's notion of man as symbol-making and symbol-using animal (Burke 56-62) serves this analysis well. Burke argues that humans compete with one another's symbols in order to persuade others and attain power. It could be argued that the CCSS is comprised of symbols and that these symbols have rhetorical value, which means they can be analyzed. Second, the CCSS contains all elements of the pentad, which provides me a set of finite factors to examine. I will examine the agent-purpose ratio of the pentad, which will help to reveal implicit motives of the CCSS.

As mentioned previously, the stated purpose of the CCSS is to prepare students for college and careers. This is called "college and career readiness" in the Anchor Standards. I identify "college and career readiness" as the purpose of the CCSS, as it determines the content and structure of all standards K-12. Using this purpose as the driving force of the standards, one can identify the five components of Burke's pentad that comprise its overt, public motive: The CCSS authors (agent), in the current climate of education reform that demands higher student achievement (scene), using resources from various organizations, foundations, and non-profits

(agency), wrote new standards meant to replace state standards from the No Child Left Behind era (act) to make all students college and career ready (purpose).

Examining relationships between ratios of elements reveals the influence that elements have on one another. These relationships can also illuminate implied meanings related to motive or entirely other, implicit motives. Applying rhetorical analysis can help us understand more critically the situation surrounding the CCSS and the unstated implications of the document. Barton and Hamilton indicate that “any study of literacy practices must therefore situate reading and writing activities in these broader contexts and motivations for use” (Barton and Hamilton 12). Reading and writing are not solitary acts that occur in a vacuum. Those who engage in literate activities have motivations for engaging with literacy; likewise, those who regulate or control literacy in certain ways have motivations for doing so. Revealing implicit motives behind the writing and implementation of the Common Core might illuminate implications that have not been considered yet.

Some questions that arise from ratios of the dramatistic pentad are the following:

- 1.) How does the use of privatized funds to accomplish this work (agency) affect the writing of the standards (act)?
- 2.) How does the larger educational context (scene) affect the purpose of the document?
- 3.) How do the writers of the CCSS (agent) working with the intent of having students be college and career ready (purpose) come into conversation with a broader audience?
- 4.) How does the distribution of the CCSS on the internet (agency) affect how the document itself (act) is received and interpreted?
- 5.) How do the identities, ideologies, and assumptions of the writers (agent) affect what they were trying to achieve with the standards (purpose)?

My goal in the following chapters is to answer the fifth question by analyzing the aforementioned twelve standards. The rhetorical analysis of the agent-purpose ratio will help me to answer my larger research question, which is the following: What can a Burkean rhetorical analysis of the Common Core State Standards (English Language Arts grades 9-12), focusing on the ratio of agent-purpose, tell us about which literacies, literacy practices, and discourses are privileged in public education today? By answering the fifth question, I will understand how the philosophies of the CCSS writers impacted what literacies they privileged in the CCSS document; this, in turn, will allow me to make appropriate generalizations about which literacies are being privileged in public school classrooms.

Before I begin the rhetorical analysis, I think it is appropriate to acknowledge my own positionality and biases because they impact how I conceptualize the Common Core as a reform measure and contextualize it within the broader discussion of public education. As a former public school teacher, I worked with the Ohio Academic Content Standards. By the time I resigned, the state had agreed to adopt the Common Core, and our school was preparing for the transition. My first exposure to the Common Core came from our school's curriculum specialist at a department meeting. My reaction at the time, since the standards were called a "revised" version of the "current" academic content (state) standards, was: "So what? It's just 'the next thing.' I don't see why it's necessary, but I'll just add this to my workload." Initially, I did not pay much attention to the revised standards and did not consider them critically. Changes in public education that directly affect instruction happen every so often, so I was unfazed when the Common Core was introduced to us.

My strongest reaction to the Common Core was directed toward the standardized assessments associated with the standards. Ohio became a PARCC state in November 2011, and

the tests were described to us the following spring. The writing exam would be administered at the end of all courses, and students would be given a series of non-fiction readings on a pre-determined topic. They would have time (a few hours?) to read the material and construct an essay based on the sources provided. I remember seething at the proposition. Timed writings are poor assessments anyway, and the test creators were taking timed writings to a whole new level. The PARCC exam website, as of January 2014, states that the “performance based component” of the writing test includes three tasks: literary analysis task, narrative task, and research simulation task. The research simulation task requires students to

analyze an informational topic presented through several articles or multimedia stimuli, the first text being an anchor text that introduces the topic. Students will engage with the texts by answering a series of questions and synthesizing information from multiple sources in order to write two analytic essays. (“Grade 11 Summative Assessment”)

I felt that this test was a poor assessment of capability, as it did not seem to account for what research in Rhetoric and Composition had discovered about the writing process.

In addition to preparing for this change, our department chair also told us that we would be assigning writing differently. Instead of assigning primarily research papers and literary analysis, we were expected to assign short, one to two page essays ten times per semester (which roughly equals one essay every other week). With the amount of grading that would entail, my colleagues and I found this difficult to accept. I also questioned if the steep increase in grading would be worthwhile for students. If anything, it seemed that moving to shorter essays was completely counterproductive. How would shorter essays encourage students to engage in sustained, critical thinking? What were short essays supposed to accomplish? How were they preparing students for college and careers? These questions still remain unanswered for me, since no definitive answers have been made available on any Common Core related documents. When I entered this Rhetoric and Composition program, the Common Core was still fresh in my

mind. As I continued in the program, I began to think more critically about the standards and what implications exist for students. When I approach this topic now, I know that my professional background and experience influence the way I think about Common Core implementation.

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS: INTRODUCTION

In the following chapters, I seek to discover implicit motives behind the writing and implementation of the Common Core, which will reveal the literacies, literacy practices, and discourses that are privileged in the CCSS document. The crux of this rhetorical analysis is the way in which I interpret the language of the standards. The interpretation of language, used to construct meaning (Rex et al. 411), will inform my understanding of the standards and their implications. Rex describes one of Paul Ricoeur's arguments regarding language: "his argument also suggests that the choice of language, with all of its related conventions for use, inscribes a particular view and set of understandings about the phenomena under study" (Rex et al. 411). My interpretation of the Common Core will be based on the language used in the document, and my understanding will allow me to make inferences regarding the document's motives and implications.

The English Language Arts standards in the Common Core contain four categories of competencies, which are also called strands. The strands include reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. All four of these are related to literacy, and since all of them require language, they are inherently political. The term "literacy" is defined as "the processes of communication" on the "Key Design Consideration" page ("Key Design Consideration"). This broad definition gives the impression that literacy is a universal phenomenon, in which all students can participate equally. If students can participate in communicative processes equally, presumably through their own efforts, then all students have the capability of attaining the status of "literate." This assumption conveniently ignores other factors that play into one's literate abilities: access to materials, supportive environments, cultural and social constructions, and the

importance of local contexts. When these factors are not taken into consideration, it is assumed that all students can engage in literate practices with the same ease, as long as they try. The responsibility of teachers and students to make students literate shifts responsibility away from other entities, such as the writers of the CCSS, who are involved in students' education. This definition also characterizes, perhaps unintentionally, literacy as being monolithic rather than multi-faceted and dynamic. If difference is essential to the definition of literacy, is the blanket description "processes of communication" appropriate, given the various privileged ways of communicating in social, cultural, or local contexts? A more complex and appropriate definition of literacy is Gee's conceptualization, which states that literacy is "a control of secondary uses of language." This definition situates literacy as being socially constructed, context dependent, and something unnatural that we have to master. This definition seems much more appropriate for an educational context, since it encompasses the complexities of literacy instead of presenting it as "processing of communication" that all students can engage in equally.

The homepage of the English Language Arts standards provides a brief description of literacies required of individuals entering the workforce or college: "As students advance through the grades and master the standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language, they are able to exhibit with increasing fullness and regularity these capacities of the literate individual" ("English Language Arts Standards"). Once again, this reinforces the attitude that abilities to read, write, speak, and listen are abstract skills that once mastered, constitute a literate individual. This reduces the complex notion of literacy to a set of finite, acquirable skills by all students in all contexts.

The stated purpose of the Common Core is to make students ready for colleges and careers, which can be supported by a number of statements in the document. On the "Key Design

Consideration” page, the Common Core dictates the percentage of literary and informational texts that students must read. It is interesting to note that literary and informational texts are divided into discrete categories. Can literature not also be informative? Can informative pieces not also attain the status of literature? Although the Common Core website does not provide specific definitions for literary and informational texts, the “Standard 10: Range, Quality, & Complexity” page delineates what genres comprise literary and informational texts. Literary texts include stories, dramas, and poetry; informational texts include literary nonfiction and historical, scientific, and technical texts (“Standard 10: Range, Quality, & Complexity”).

The “Key Design” page indicates that a 2009 report from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) calls for an emphasis on informational text, just as the CCSS does. While the “Key Design” page does not assert that its reading and writing distributions are based on this report, the page does indicate that “assessments aligned with the Standards should adhere to the distribution of texts across grades cited in the NAEP framework” (“Key Design Consideration”). However, the information provided on the “Key Design” page of the Common Core website and the information provided in the 2009 NAEP report contradict. For example, the “Key Design” page says that “fulfilling the Standards for 6–12 ELA requires much greater attention to a specific category of informational text—literary nonfiction—than has been traditional” (“Key Design Consideration”). Here, literary nonfiction is classified as informational text. However, the NAEP report lists three types of reading as literary: “fiction; literary nonfiction, such as essays, speeches, autobiographies or biographies; and poetry” (National Assessment of Educational Progress). The NAEP report lists literary nonfiction as literary text, not informational. Labeling literary nonfiction as literary text in the NAEP report and as informational text on the Common Core website is confusing, and there is no explanation

provided for the discrepancy. In the same NAEP report, informational text is defined as “exposition; argumentation and persuasive text; and procedural texts and documents” (National Assessment of Educational Progress).

Assuming that the categories of literary and informational texts are accurate groupings, as artificial as they might appear, it is important to know why this distinction exists. On the “Key Design Consideration” page, it is indicated that “most of the required reading in college and workforce training programs is informational in structure and challenging in content” (“Key Design Consideration”). Therefore, there is a strong emphasis on informational texts in the Common Core, with the following reading expectations:

Grade	Literary	Information
4	50%	50%
8	45%	55%
12	30%	70%

Figure 1

As shown in Figure 1, by grade 12, students should be reading 30% literary texts and 70% informational texts. The rationale behind this decision is to produce “college and career ready students [who are] proficient in reading complex informational text independently in a variety of content areas” (“Key Design Consideration”). It is important to note that these percentages are school-wide, which means that ELA classes will probably not be teaching 70% informational texts in their classes. However, there is a strong emphasis on incorporating more informational texts into ELA classrooms. Interestingly, in the description of the reading percentage breakdown, the CCSS authors chose to explain the importance of informational texts, while ignoring the importance of the literature texts. Literature is mentioned as a primary type of

reading in ELA classrooms, but the importance of literature is not stated. This is an interesting move, given that literature has always been privileged in ELA classrooms. Additional discussion regarding this issue will occur in the following rhetorical analysis chapters.

The same page of the CCSS document contains expectations for writing in several grade levels. The three “communicative purposes” within this writing framework are writing to persuade, writing to explain, and writing to convey experience. As shown in Figure 2, as the grade levels increase, the percentages of “to convey experience” decrease. Conversely, the tasks “to persuade” and “to explain” increase. Dividing these purposes into three discrete categories is a reductive, simplistic way of viewing both purpose and genre. Many texts are able to accomplish two or all three of these tasks effectively; characterizing these three writing tasks as mutually exclusive is a disservice to students. Additionally, most literacy specialists would challenge the notion of literacy emphasized by these artificial divisions.

Grade	To Persuade	To Explain	To Convey Experience
4	30%	35%	35%
8	35%	35%	30%
12	40%	40%	20%

Figure 2

Regarding writing tasks for grades 9-12, the document clearly states: “the overwhelming focus of writing throughout high school should be on arguments and informative/explanatory texts” (“Key Design Consideration”). If students engage in these types of writing, it is believed that they will be better prepared for college and careers.

The “Key Design Consideration” page suggests that informational texts should be privileged over literary texts in public school classrooms. Although many ELA teachers may

continue teaching primarily literature, the expectation is that ELA classrooms will incorporate more non-fiction, informational, and persuasive texts. Additionally, persuasive and expository writing are privileged over narrative writing. This is an interesting move, but it is unsurprising given the fact that the writers of the Common Core believe engagement with these writing tasks will make students career and college ready. The rationale is if students read informational texts and produce persuasive and expository pieces, they will be better prepared for academia and their future jobs. There is a logical flaw here, though. If students read an informational text in high school, it may not resemble informational texts they encounter after graduation. Since writing is contextual, learning how to decipher what is considered informational in one context might not be useful when deciphering an informational text in a completely different context. Likewise, producing expository and persuasive texts in an artificial classroom environment does not reflect writing that students will complete when they enter the workforce. There seems to be a disconnect between what the CCSS writers wish to accomplish and what they emphasize in both reading and writing tasks.

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS: PURPOSE

The goal of this project is to explore the implicit motives of the Common Core by analyzing the agent-purpose ratio involved in the creation of the standards. This chapter will specifically examine how six standards support the publicly stated purpose of the Common Core. The publicly stated purpose of the Common Core is stated explicitly on the standards' webpage and has been mentioned in this document: the standards hope to make students college and career ready in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language (“Students Who are College and Career Ready in Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, & Language”).

STANDARD 1: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2

In order to support their vision of students being college and career ready, the writers developed a series of standards that describe tasks students should be able to accomplish in high school ELA classes. The first standard that includes such a task is: “Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.” The corresponding standard for grades 11 and 12 is identical to this one. This standard requires that students write both informative and explanatory texts, while engaging in a number of other tasks. In order to produce writing that is effective, according to this standard, students must do the following: effectively select content for their pieces, effectively organize the content, effectively analyze the content, and examine and convey ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately. Embedded in this standard are various parts of the writing process, which is a beneficial aspect of this standard. By including the other steps in the process, such as selecting appropriate sources, organizing information, and analyzing information, hopefully students

would gain practice with complex writing processes. For those students entering college, this standard might be useful in preparing students for college level writing tasks.

STANDARD 2: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.8

Another writing standard for grades 11 and 12 is intended to prepare students for writing tasks in which they may engage in a post-secondary academic setting: “Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and overreliance on any one source and following a standard format for citation.” The corresponding standard for grades 9 and 10 has one change; instead of requiring students to “assess the strengths and limitations of each source in terms of the task, purpose, and audience,” the 9 and 10 grade standard requires that students simply “assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question.” The 9th and 10th grade standard is the simpler of the two, which seems appropriate. The standard for grades 11 and 12 requires students to complete a series of tasks to produce an effective research paper or project. Students must use advanced searches effectively, identify both print and digital sources as being authoritative, assess the strengths and limitations of said sources, gather relevant information from said sources, integrate the information effectively to maintain flow, avoid plagiarism, avoid overreliance on any one source, and follow a standard format for citation.

This standard, similar to the standard for informative/explanatory texts above, includes several parts of the writing process. These various components are not necessarily conveyed as being a linear process, which is consistent with research illustrating that writing is recursive. However, the listing of the tasks in the standard does imply a kind of order for students to follow.

This might be problematic for teachers who do not understand the recursive nature of the writing process. Another problematic aspect of the standard is the integration of source material into an essay to maintain flow. The word “flow” implies a way of writing that contains a seamless progression of ideas that is easy to understand. Although this is not stated, it could be interpreted that “flow” adheres to the Western conceptualization of structure. In this model, writers use both logical progression (usually through rhetorical techniques) and directness (through clear and precise language) to maintain appropriate flow (Maune, et al.) Not all cultures write in this manner, however, which makes this standard uniquely Western in its expectation. For writers who are English Language Learners (ELL) or have come from cultures where non-linear (a Western term) writing exists, students will have to adapt to the Western model of constructing text. The implication for these students, then, is they have to be inscribed into a Western way of writing in order to successfully negotiate the discourses of school.

STANDARD 3: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.3

For grades 9-12, students are required to produce arguments, informative/explanatory essays, narratives, and research papers. When examining these four types of writing, it is apparent that expository and persuasive writing are privileged in the CCSS, as they account for three of the four types of writing. The remaining type, narrative writing, is not emphasized to the same degree. The narrative writing standard I chose to analyze is the following: “Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.” The corresponding standard for grades 9 and 10 is identical to this one. This standard includes five substandards, which provide additional depth and requirements for narrative writing.

Interestingly, this standard requires students to produce narratives that are quite limited in craft. The aspect of this standard that intrigues me is the clinical nature of the requirements. The first substandard, for example, requires that students “create a smooth progression of experiences or events” (“Writing Grade 11-12”). Not all pieces of literature, or narratives in general, follow this linear progression, and including this requirement does not reflect the reality of many narratives that exist. An example of an experimental novel that pushes back against a traditionally Western, linear narrative progression would be Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves*, but it is still a widely read and acclaimed text. The emphasis on linear progression is not only inconsistent with the way some narratives are written, but it also reinforces a particular way of writing that is hegemonic and Western.

The fourth substandard indicates that students’ narratives should include “precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language” to convey vivid pictures of “experiences, events, setting, and/or characters” (“Writing Grade 11-12”). This requirement pigeonholes narrative writing in such a way that actually discourages creativity. If students must use certain elements, rather than making the conscious choice to include elements appropriate for the narrative, students are being restricted in how they conceptualize and produce their narratives.

The last substandard calls for students to “provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative” (“Writing Grade 11-12”). This standard expects students to end their narratives by describing the moral of the story, even though this expectation is uncharacteristic of narrative writing. The requirement does not reflect usual narrative writing, as authors generally do not end their stories in an overtly didactic manner. It is interesting to me that narrative writing, which generally is used as an

opportunity for students to be creative and develop their own writing styles and techniques, is depicted in such a clinical manner in the Common Core.

As aforementioned, narrative writing is not privileged in the CCSS, as it comprises only 20% of writing tasks in grade 12. Instead, the emphasis is placed on analytical, expository, and persuasive writing. This is probably the case because David Coleman, lead writer of the ELA standards, considers these writing types to be more important for college and career readiness standards (“Introductory Videos on the Common Core State Standards”). While I agree that expository and persuasive writing may prepare students well for the types of writing tasks they will engage in after graduation, narrative writing is also important.

Coleman believes differently, however. During one of Coleman’s talks entitled “Bringing the Common Core to Life,” he indicated: “the only problem with these two forms of writing [exposition of a personal opinion or the presentation of a personal narrative] is as you grow up in this world, you realize people don’t really give a shit about what you feel or what you think” (“Bringing the Common Core to Life”). This opinion greatly influenced which types of writing are or are not privileged in the CCSS. Additionally, it reveals one of Coleman’s philosophical assumptions regarding the relationship between school and the adult world. Coleman, as one of the agents of the Common Core, does not value personal or narrative writing because he does not see its eventual pragmatic value in college and in the workplace. He does not understand that many teachers use personal narratives to achieve different purposes: to engage students, to make class content relatable to students, and to foster students’ creativity. However, Coleman has never been a teacher and thus cannot fully understand the material realities of a classroom in the same way that a trained educator can.

What Coleman excludes from his discussion is that narrative writing can serve useful purposes outside of the traditional purposes of storytelling. Oftentimes, narratives can be used to support and strengthen expository or persuasive texts. They have value by increasing engagement and interest in a given topic, making the text more effective for readers. Conversely, narratives can also provide information or act as effective persuasive pieces. An example might be Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, which is a collection of stories about American soldiers serving during the Vietnam War. These narratives provide details about the war that might not be as accessible to students in other informational texts. In this way, the stories serve to teach the audience about the Vietnam War with a first-person account, which extends far beyond Coleman's view of the purpose of narrative writing. Additionally, students might be persuaded to think about war differently, based on O'Brien's vivid accounts. Because narrative writing can function to enhance expository writing and can also serve other functions (to inform or persuade), Coleman's view about narrative writing seems quite narrow and reductive. Additionally, since many texts that students read fulfill more than one function, the discrete categories of narrative, expository, and persuasive writing do not actually appear to be mutually exclusive in practice.

ELA STANDARDS INTRODUCTION PAGE

One of the statements about literacy on the ELA Standards Introduction page indicates that the standards "lay out a vision of what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century" ("English Language Arts Standards"). These literacies are intended to have "wide applicability outside the classroom or workplace," but no other specific contexts are mentioned ("English Language Arts Standards"). The writers included the phrase "literate person in the twenty-first century" which implies that 21st century literacy is unique in comparison to other

historical moments. The evolving demands of literacy reinforce Deborah Brandt's assertion that changing economic conditions warrant increases in literacy demands. Someone who constitutes a literate individual in the 21st century is not explicitly defined, but the Standards Introduction page does include a series of sentences that indicate what students who meet the standards are able to do. These sentences are summarized in one statement: "In short, students who meet the Standards develop the skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening that are the foundation for any creative and purposeful expression in language" ("English Language Arts Standards"). It is beneficial that the Common Core lists specific literacy practices that are targeted during classroom instruction, as they contrast the notion of "universal literacy" that is sometimes misused to characterize engagement with literacy activities. However, it is also important that these literacy practices are not described as acontextual skills that can be transferred to any situation.

STANDARD 4: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.6

Two literacies associated with critical reading and writing, which are competencies listed on this webpage, are computer and digital literacies. One of the standards I have chosen to rhetorically analyze in the writing strand states that students should "Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information." The corresponding standard for grades 9 and 10 actually includes additional requirements, asking students to take "advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically."

I think the reason these two tasks do not appear in the standard for grades 11 and 12 is that they are supposed to be mastered by the end of grade 10. If students know how to link

information and display information effectively, they can use these abilities in grades 11 and 12. Interestingly, this standard does not define what technology / technologies students should be using. Handwriting on paper, for instance, is a kind of technology, but I doubt the authors were referring to that. Instead, I think their intent was to emphasize the use of computer and digital literacies, particularly because of their addition of “including the Internet.” Additionally, the “Students Who are College and Career Ready in Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, & Language” page of the Common Core lists characteristics that students meeting the standards should have. One of the characteristics is that students “use technology and digital media strategically and capably” (“Students Who are College and Career Ready in Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, & Language”). The technologies alluded to here are digital in nature, as the phrases “searches online” and “technological tools and mediums” are included in the paragraph that describes the characteristic. This standard can be situated in research on literacy, since literacy is a communicative tool and thus “is located in relation to other mass media and new technologies” (Barton and Hamilton 10). Because the ability to use technology is one of the characteristics listed on this page, it has a privileged place in the standards as defining one who is “literate” and ready for college and careers.

While we have different literacies that have only recently come into existence, such as computer and digital literacies, these new literacies are still embedded in power structures (as all literacies are) and serve to benefit either their users or their sponsors. The writers have assumed that these literacies are essential for both college and the workplace, which explains why the abilities to use computers and the Internet are privileged in the Common Core. While it is true that computer and digital literacies prepare students well for the demands of college and some workplaces, I would argue that these literacies do not necessarily make someone 21st century

literate. Due to the stratification of educational opportunities, differences in access to technologies and materials, and the existence of a multitude of contexts, people who live in the U.S. will have different encounters with and uses of literacy in the twenty-first century. The CCSS writers' definition of a literate person in the twenty-first century is quite limiting and serves only to perpetuate their goal: to prepare graduates for their eventual role in the workplace. It must be acknowledged, though, that digital technologies are not used in all workplaces. The emphasis of digital literacies in the standards underscores certain assumptions held by the writers of the Common Core regarding which literacies are relevant and prominent in many workplaces today.

STANDARD 5: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.3

One of the standards in the language strand focuses on understanding language in a variety of contexts. This standard applies to grades 9 and 10: "Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening." The corresponding standard for grades 11 and 12 is identical. One strength of this standard is its emphasis on language use in different contexts. Although students most likely have an understanding of communicating in various contexts with different audiences, explicit discussion on the topic can help students conceptualize their participation in different discourse communities. This can benefit students greatly, as students may learn how to effectively enter and negotiate the terrain of discourse communities after graduation. As students enter college and the workplace, their awareness of discourse communities and the contextual nature of language will empower them to learn the rules of discourse communities they wish to enter. This sense of empowerment may even provide students a sense of agency to enter, challenge, or change discourses in which they

participate. In this way, the standard is useful for students who will be entering various contexts after graduation. Because this standard recognizes the context dependent nature of language, it is consistent with research on language and prepares students for some of the writing, reading, and speaking tasks they will encounter.

A weakness of the standard is its lack of discussion surrounding the political nature of contexts themselves and how language is situated in power structures. The desire for students to think critically about contexts, ideologies, and discourses is closely associated with Paulo Freire's theory of critical pedagogy. Henry Giroux characterized this pedagogy as an "educational movement, guided by passion and principle, to help students develop consciousness of freedom, recognize authoritarian tendencies, and connect knowledge to power and the ability to take constructive action" ("Lessons from Paulo Freire"). If the standard included a discussion of language that offered students the ability to take constructive action, it would be even more useful. Because the standard ignores the political aspect of language, and only requires that students learn to use it for various functions, students will most likely not engage critically with power structures, ideologies, and language use that inform the existence of contexts. Instead, students will simply learn how to effectively communicate in different contexts. While this is worthwhile to learn, the opportunity for students to think critically about the political nature of language is not invited. Perhaps the writers did not feel this critical engagement was necessary, or perhaps they were not aware of the existence of critical pedagogy. Regardless of the reason, the effect of the current standard is that students are not invited to disrupt hegemonic ways of using language, which essentially leaves them in a position to perpetuate dominant language practices in existing discourses. Ultimately, this standard is used to prepare students for their

communicative interactions in college and careers, so the standard supports the explicit purpose of the Common Core.

STANDARD 6: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.6

The language standards dictate how students should acquire and use language, as well as what language practices are acceptable. One such standard I have chosen to analyze, for grades 11 and 12, is the following: “Acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.” The corresponding standard for grades 9 and 10 is identical to this one. This standard contains two parts, the first of which asks students to “acquire and use accurately general academic and domain-specific words and phrases.” General academic language, though it sounds useful, ignores the contextual nature of language. Academic language learned in a high school ELA classroom might serve students well in college contexts, but it might not. Additionally, domain-specific knowledge is mentioned, but specific domains are not listed. Which domains are being referred to? Should these domains be closely aligned with areas of studies students are interested in pursuing? Again, language use is contextual, which means it is difficult (and possibly useless) to learn domain-specific language out of context. However, the writers of the CCSS believe that learning such language “at the college and career readiness level” will benefit students as they enter academic settings after graduation.

The second component of the standard asks students to demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge. It is not surprising that the emphasis on independent thinking and work is addressed here. In both the reading literature and reading informational text sections,

the document indicates that students should read texts “independently and proficiently.” In these two strands, the need for students to complete work independently is stressed. The CCSS writers expect students to engage in reading and writing tasks independently to help prepare them for work they might encounter after graduation. I will elaborate on the emphasis of independent work in the next chapter.

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS: MOTIVE 1

The intent of the next two chapters is to examine the agent-purpose ratio in more detail to reveal unstated motives of the Common Core. Some background on agents has already appeared, and more will be provided in the following chapters. Additionally, the stated purpose of the Common Core, as explored in-depth in the previous chapter, will underscore the motives being discussed in the next two chapters.

VERBS USED IN THE STANDARDS

The reading strand is interesting in that it includes the following verbs for both the literature and informational text standards: cite, determine, provide, analyze, demonstrate, read, comprehend, integrate, evaluate, and delineate. If the verbs were placed on the hierarchy of Bloom's taxonomy, they would appear in several categories. Some of the tasks require lower-order thinking, such as "comprehend" and "provide." Others require higher-order thinking, such as "analyze" and "evaluate." Although the verb "create," which signifies the highest-order thinking task according to the revised version of Bloom's taxonomy, is missing from the reading strand, one might argue that other verbs such as "analyze" and "evaluate" require students to create written products (Overbaugh and Shultz). When examining the reading and writing strands, it is interesting to note the primary creation required is through the act of writing. In the speaking and listening strand, giving presentations involves the creation of materials and can be placed under the umbrella of "create," as well. Writing and giving presentations constitutes the highest-order thinking process in the ELA standards, which demonstrates what the CCSS writers consider important for students to know and do. When examining the strands holistically, it appears that Language Arts classrooms function as spaces for students to read hegemonic or non-

fiction texts and write arguments about them. If Language Arts classrooms are defined this way, we begin to see how the CCSS writers envision classrooms to function and what their purposes are. Additionally, this definition includes certain reading and writing tasks while excluding others, which illustrates what the CCSS writers find important. In this section, I would like to explore what exactly is being privileged in some of the standards and consider the rationale behind this privileging.

STANDARD 7: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1

The first reading literature standard for grades 11 and 12 is the following: “Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.” The corresponding standard for grades 9 and 10 omits the part of the standard that says “including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.” Determining uncertainty is a more advanced task, as it requires a more nuanced understanding of the text. Indicating that there is uncertainty in a text implies that there is certainty, as well. Certainty suggests that there is a definite meaning, an ideal meaning, an inherent meaning that readers can deduce. This conceptualization of understanding supports the notion that there is an objective truth or objective reality that we can understand. Instead of describing reading as a meaning-making process in which all readers can engage, this standard emphasizes the attitude that readers interpret an objective, author-intended meaning that contains both certainty and uncertainty. This approach to reading has been questioned and challenged by postmodern ways of thinking, which posit that an objective reality does not exist. Within this framework, our subjective understandings of the world allow for a significant degree of uncertainty. Therefore, we cannot know for certain what meaning is imbued in a particular piece of writing. We are the ones who

create meaning, which makes our meaning-making processes highly subjective. The view of objective reality is closely associated with traditionally hierarchical and rhetorical ways of thinking, which is privileged in this standard.

Additionally, it appears that reading to determine certainty or uncertainty are culturally embedded. For example, if a class were to read Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," students would need certain cultural background and knowledge to understand that the essay is satirical. If students did not understand the satirical nature of the piece, due to the lack of cultural knowledge, they might argue (certainly) that Swift genuinely wants children to be sold and eaten. Another standard requires that students distinguish "what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant," which includes understanding satire ("Reading: Literature Grade 11-12"). However, there is no acknowledgment that understanding "what is really meant" is contingent upon readers' understanding of cultural and historical knowledge with which students might be unfamiliar. Instead, the CCSS writers seem to assume that all students have the same cultural understandings – which are Western, white, and hegemonic – as evidenced by the authors and texts that are incorporated in the standards. For example, the authors and texts that appear in the Reading: Literature Standards for grades 9 and 10 are W. H. Auden's poem "Musée des Beaux Arts," Pieter Breughel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, Shakespeare, Ovid, and the Bible. All of the authors and artists mentioned in this list are Western white males, and the works are hegemonic. Many of these authors and works are Greek or are based on Greek stories and mythology. The Bible, a religious text that is familiar to many Westerners, is included for some unusual reason. All of the aforementioned authors and works are simply suggestions for inclusion into curriculum, and it is not required that they be taught. In the Reading: Literature

Standard for grades 11 and 12, only one author is mentioned: Shakespeare. Shakespeare appears differently in this section, however, as he is required to be included in classroom instruction.

The standard requires students to analyze multiple interpretations of a story, and in parenthesis after the standard appears this sentence, which is presumably a side note to teachers: “Include at least one play by Shakespeare and one play by an American dramatist” (“Reading: Literature Grade 11-12”). The wording of this sentence suggests that Shakespeare must be taught in grades 11 and 12; additionally, he is the only specific author that must be taught. Based on the authors and works that are included in these sections, I conclude that the readings students will most likely engage in are Western and hegemonic, which helps to perpetuate a discourse that is both white and patriarchal. (It must be acknowledged that the Reading: Informational Text Standards include other authors and works, which I will describe later in this chapter.) Based on these observations, it seems that the CCSS writers have assumed students should already have certain cultural knowledge and understandings, despite the fact that many students do not necessarily have this knowledge automatically. Therefore, students who have certain cultural knowledge will be able to navigate more easily the particular tasks assigned to them (such as differentiating between what is “certain” and “uncertain” and identifying satire).

Based on the authors and works included in the reading literature section, it appears that the cultural knowledge privileged in the standards is Western, patriarchal, and hegemonic. Those students who are not assimilated into or familiar with this cultural knowledge, such as immigrants from Eastern societies and some minority groups, will have a steeper learning curve because their ways of knowing are not privileged in these particular standards. Although this is a generalization, I would argue that students from white, middle-class backgrounds are better equipped to engage in the tasks required in the reading standards because they have backgrounds

that afford them cultural and social knowledge privileged in the standards. For example, if students from a non-European background did not understand the significance of family names in European aristocracy, they might not understand the parody of the family tree in Voltaire's *Candide*. The parody might not be automatic to students who lack particular cultural knowledge. Identifying aspects of writing, such as parody and satire, are depicted by the CCSS writers as abstract skills. This assumption ignores the deep associations of satire and parody to cultural and social knowledge, as well as how deeply embedded satire and parody are in cultural traditions and practices.

Coming back to the standard, then, we can see that the requirement for students to determine “where the text leaves matters uncertain” is largely dependent on cultural knowledge and associations, which advantages some students while disadvantaging others. The rest of the standard asks students to “cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.” Students are asked to provide evidence to support claims, which is a classically Aristotelian rhetorical technique for strengthening arguments. The inclusion of this requirement, therefore, has associations with Western classical rhetoric. This is significant because it illustrates, among other standards, the influence of Western rhetoric on the standards overall.

DAVID COLEMAN AS AGENT

As I indicated at the beginning of this chapter, there is an emphasis on informational texts over literature, presumably because informational texts are considered more worthwhile for college and career readiness. The emphasis on informational texts and the inclusion of Western classical rhetoric is interesting, given David Coleman's strong classicist background. Coleman studied at Yale and obtained a Rhodes Scholarship; he then studied “English literature at the

University of Oxford and classical educational philosophy at the University of Cambridge” (“Our Leadership”). He emphasized his strong classicist background at the College Board National Forum in 2012: “as a result of all this work, I had a BA in Philosophy, a second BA in English Literature, and a Master’s Degree in Greek Philosophy — three degrees which entitle you to zero jobs” (“News and Press”).

I find this quote intriguing for three reasons. First, Coleman’s training as a classicist might lead one to suppose that there would be an emphasis on classical or traditional literature in the CCSS. Topics related to these areas of study are incorporated in the CCSS and the Colorado Sample Curriculum. However, the emphasis on informational texts does not seem to align with Coleman’s scholarly expertise. Second, Coleman finishes his quote indicating that he had “degrees which entitle [him] to zero jobs,” which perhaps provided the impetus for emphasizing informational texts in the CCSS. If practicality was important to him, he might have wanted to shift importance from readings considered impractical to readings considered more pragmatic. Stotsky points out, though, that the belief of the Common Core architects

seems to be based on what they see as the logical implication of the fact that college students read more informational than literary texts. However, there is absolutely no empirical research to suggest that college readiness is promoted by informational or nonfiction reading in high school English classes. (Stotsky 1)

If this is the case, then emphasis on non-fiction texts appears to be unwarranted. Third, Coleman’s degrees demonstrate that he is not an expert on literacy. The model of literacy used in the standards, then, is not informed by his professional expertise. We can, however, see why Western hegemonic texts are privileged in the standards. Coleman’s educational background and expertise most likely influenced what he chose to include and emphasize in the standards; these choices were undoubtedly affected by his biases.

KEY POINTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND STANDARD 10

The “Key Points in English Language Arts” page under the Common Core Resources tab mandates four types of texts for students to read: “classic myths and stories from around the world, foundational U.S. documents, seminal works of American literature, and the writings of Shakespeare” (“Key Points in English Language Arts”). Classic myths and stories from around the world include primarily European texts, which excludes stories from most of the world’s population. The terms “foundational” and “seminal” could be considered problematic because of their exclusionary and sexist connotations, but I would like to give the CCSS writers the benefit of the doubt on the diction used here. Foundational U.S. documents and seminal works of American literature privilege U.S. writings, which might decrease interest in and tolerance of cultures and societies different than our own. At the very least, this requirement might exist in order to increase nationalism and patriotism for the U.S. As mentioned previously, the only author mentioned by name here is Shakespeare, which suggests this author has an incredibly privileged status in the standards. Based on these four types of readings students are required to engage in, we can see that the Western canon is being preserved and propagated in public schools, perhaps at the expense of other types of literature and texts. A sample of readings that demonstrates the level of complexity expected in the Common Core is provided on the “Standard 10: Range, Quality, & Complexity” page:

9-10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Tragedy of Macbeth</i> by William Shakespeare (1592) • "Ozymandias" by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1817) • "The Raven" by Edgar Allen Poe (1845) • "The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry (1906) • <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> by John Steinbeck (1939) • <i>Fahrenheit 451</i> by Ray Bradbury (1953) • <i>The Killer Angels</i> by Michael Shaara (1975) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Speech to the Second Virginia Convention" by Patrick Henry (1775) • "Farewell Address" by George Washington (1796) • "Gettysburg Address" by Abraham Lincoln (1863) • "State of the Union Address" by Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1941) • "Letter from Birmingham Jail" by Martin Luther King, Jr. (1964) • "Hope, Despair and Memory" by Elie Wiesel (1997)
11-CCR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Ode on a Grecian Urn" by John Keats (1820) • <i>Jane Eyre</i> by Charlotte Brontë (1848) • "Because I Could Not Stop for Death" by Emily Dickinson (1890) • <i>The Great Gatsby</i> by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1925) • <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> by Zora Neale Hurston (1937) • <i>A Raisin in the Sun</i> by Lorraine Hansberry (1959) • <i>The Namesake</i> by Jhumpa Lahiri (2003) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Common Sense</i> by Thomas Paine (1776) • <i>Walden</i> by Henry David Thoreau (1854) • "Society and Solitude" by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1857) • "The Fallacy of Success" by G. K. Chesterton (1909) • <i>Black Boy</i> by Richard Wright (1945) • "Politics and the English Language" by George Orwell (1946) • "Take the Tortillas Out of Your Poetry" by Rudolfo Anaya (1995)

Figure 3

The note at the bottom of the "Key Points" page indicates that these are not the only suggested readings for grades 9-12, and Appendix B of the ELA appendices (provided on the Common Core website) provides additional readings. After reading Appendix B, I agree that these readings are representative of the Common Core's recommendations in terms of range,

quality, and complexity. Figure 3 contains readings for both literature and informational texts that students might read in grades 9-12. There are a total of 27 documents. 22 of the 27 documents ($\approx 81\%$) were written by men; 21 of the 27 documents ($\approx 78\%$) were written by whites; 27 out of the 27 documents (100%) were written by American or English authors (including Elie Wiesel). The emphasis on texts written by Western white men illustrates the privileging of the Western hegemonic canon in the standards.

STANDARD 8: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.9

The emphasis on foundational U.S. documents is heavily expressed in the informational text section. One of the standards for grades 9 and 10 indicates that students should “analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (e.g., Washington’s Farewell Address, the Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms speech, King’s ‘Letter from Birmingham Jail’), including how they address related themes and concepts.” This is the only standard for grades 9 and 10 that mentions specific authors and pieces; these texts are provided as examples of what can be taught. It is apparent from the sample list that U.S. historical documents, which are considered a part of the traditional canon, should be emphasized. While I think it is important for students to be familiar with U.S. history and analyze historical documents, I question why all specific examples of authors and texts in this section are listed under this one standard. Why do no other standards in the informational text section contain specific examples of authors and texts? There are surely a number of non-fiction and informational texts, not associated with U.S. foundational documents, which might have been listed.

Additionally, when looking at the suggested authors, we can make observations about who is being privileged. All four of the authors listed are male, and three of the four are white.

One might argue that the people primarily responsible for constructing U.S. historical documents were white males, so the suggestions listed in this standard are reasonable. I would argue that the current way we organize what is considered historically significant privileges authors who are part of the dominant culture over those who are part of marginalized groups. The stipulation that students read “documents of historical and literary significance” can be quite limiting, as one could argue that certain historical texts written by female, African American, or Native American authors are not actually historically “significant” and therefore are not worthy of being taught. Examples of authors that might have been included in this suggested list, but were not, are Phillis Wheatley, Anne Bradstreet, and N. Scott Momaday. The choice to include George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King Jr. as suggested authors reveals the values of the CCSS writers.

Instead of offering suggestions for authors and texts that are part of traditionally marginalized and unrecognized groups, the authors instead chose to reinforce texts that are already part of the dominant discourse and culture. In this way, the authors (whether intentionally or unintentionally) have chosen to uphold the status quo while continuing to marginalize authors and texts from minority groups. I do not mean to suggest that students should not read U.S. historical documents written by white males simply because they were written by white males; I simply wish to question what implications exist due to this privileging.

Additionally, I wish to question the discourse being perpetuated by the language in this standard and how students are indoctrinated into the dominant discourse through the privileging of historical documents written by males, most of whom are white. When the informational text page is looked at holistically, the only authors who appear in informational text standards for grades 9 and 10 are George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and

Martin Luther King Jr. This standard addresses all informational and non-fiction texts, but interestingly, the suggested content is quite limited in scope. For grades 11 and 12, in the reading informational text category there are two standards that include suggested texts and one standard that includes required texts. Suggested authors and texts include the following: James Madison's Federalist No. 10, U.S. Supreme Court majority opinions and dissents, *The Federalist*, and presidential addresses. Required texts include the following: The Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. From this list, we can deduce that U.S. historical documents have a privileged place in the standards, which supports the intention expressed on the "Key Points" page. For grades 11 and 12, as with grades 9 and 10, no other author or text suggestions outside of U.S. historical documents are provided on the informational text pages.

STANDARD 9: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.5

One of the Reading: Informational Texts standards I have chosen to analyze is the following: "Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging." The corresponding standard for grades 9 and 10 is actually worded much differently, which is unusual for the high school standards. The standard for grades 9 and 10 is the following: "Analyze in detail how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text (e.g., a section or chapter)." This standard asks students to analyze how ideas are developed in a particular structure; the standard for grades 11 and 12 asks students to evaluate the effectiveness of structure. This increased difficulty is appropriate, given that the writers designed the ELA Standards as a metaphorical "staircase" of increasing text complexity ("How to Read the Standards"). When students are in grades 11 and

12, they should theoretically be able to analyze the effectiveness of structure, understanding how structure impacts an author's persuasiveness.

Since structure is at the center of this standard, we must consider what kinds of structures would possibly appear in classroom instruction. Based on the examples of authors and texts that have already been mentioned, we can reasonably conclude that students will encounter structures often used in American and European texts. The structures of different genres will vary greatly, but there are a few generalizations we can make about typical Western writing. British and American writing tends to be straightforward, deductive, and linear (Xing, Wang, and Spencer 73, 74). Even literary works taught in schools, such as poems, plays, and novels generally follow a linear, logical progression of ideas for readers to follow easily. By contrast, the Eastern tradition usually uses metaphorical, inductive, and circular patterns of writing (Xing, Wang, and Spencer 73, 74). It is possible that both Western and non-Western structures would be introduced in classroom instruction, but based on the four types of writing the CCSS designers acknowledged privileging, it seems that Western structures would most likely be read and analyzed.

This standard requires that students conduct analyses of structures, and their essays will also likely adopt a Western conceptualization of paper writing, which involves a linear organization of content. Once the thesis is stated, students support their claim with reasons and evidence, and they probably finish the essay with a conclusion (Xing, Wang, and Spencer 74). Most likely, students will not construct essays that follow an Eastern organization of writing, which privileges a circular and inductive approach. Because students likely will read Western texts and follow a Western model of writing, Western structures are being privileged in this standard.

STANDARD 10: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4

A speaking and listening standard for grades 11 and 12 initially appears to account for a range of contexts in which speaking tasks would occur. The standard is written as: “Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.” The corresponding standard for grades 9 and 10 is slightly different, but the same main ideas are expressed. Here are the differences in wording:

Grades 9 and 10: and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically

Grades 11 and 12: and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective

Grades 9 and 10: such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization

Grades 11 and 12: such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning

Grades 9 and 10: N/A

Grades 11 and 12: alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed

Grades 9 and 10: development, substance, and style

Grades 11 and 12: organization, development, substance, and style

Grades 9 and 10: appropriate to purpose, audience, and task

Grades 11 and 12: appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks

The most significant difference between the two standards is the inclusion of “alternative or opposing perspectives” for grades 11 and 12. When students include additional perspectives in their presentations, they have the opportunity to explore the complexities of issues and topics. This aspect the standard assists students in viewing issues differently, as dynamic and multi-faceted, rather than as simplistic or facile.

The end of the standard asks that students modify their presentations according to the “purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.” Giving presentations in a classroom setting can be a valuable experience for students, but I question to what extent these

presentations are authentic. Students can create and give presentations that have different purposes and are designed for a range of tasks, but they usually occur within a fixed setting for an artificial audience. These circumstances do not reflect the conditions in which real-world presentations are given. One might argue that the skills learned from classroom presentations can transfer to other situations, but this transferability is likely limited. When people enter different discourse communities after graduation, they must learn new rules of communicating effectively within those communities, which will impact to what degree high school learning will transfer to these new contexts.

Additionally, the same criteria are used to assess all presentations in this standard. How presentations are assessed in college or workplace settings might be different, which would affect the transferability of skills learned in high school presentations to other contexts. Although students are required to create presentations for a variety of purposes and tasks, listeners must be able to “follow the line of reasoning” of the presentation. While the standard does not explicitly state what structure or format speakers should use, it is implied by the inclusion of “follow the line of reasoning.” In order for listeners to understand a presentation, it is implied that the presentation should be arranged in such a manner that contains a logical progression of ideas. Even though there are different methods of writing and speaking in various social and cultural contexts, we can see in this standard that a particular method is being privileged over others. The method most used in Western culture, a linear method, is implied here. A linear method would help to facilitate the standard’s call for listeners to “follow the line of reasoning.” This cultural privileging is not explicitly stated, but it does require students to participate in a characteristically Western discourse in order to meet the standard.

STANDARD 11: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.1

The language strand of the Standards dictates how students should acquire and use language for their reading, writing, speaking, and listening tasks. One such standard for grades 9 and 10 indicates that students must “demonstrate command of the conventions of Standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.” The corresponding standard for grades 11 and 12 is identical. Much of the work completed to meet the standards requires writing or speaking, and writing tasks are embedded in the reading and writing strands; tasks that involve speaking are located in the speaking and listening strand. Because writing and speaking tasks occur often, if not daily, in ELA classrooms, this standard is ubiquitously infused in student learning. While some standards may be met with one (or a series) of assignments, this standard must be met consistently over the course of several years because it is embedded in other required tasks. This gives the standard a privileged place among the others. Therefore, the political ideology carried with this standard has even more influence than the ideology present in other standards.

This standard uses the term “standard English,” which is a particular form of the English language that is accepted as the norm in dominant social and cultural contexts. However, there is no regulating or governing body that determines what language use is acceptable, so all “rules” that exist for standard English are socially constructed and change over time. This increases the difficulty of meeting the standard, as the dialect is not a permanent construction and there might be ambiguity in what language use is acceptable in different regions and local contexts. Standard English in this case probably refers to General American, a dominant cultural dialect in the U.S. that is privileged in some workplaces, in academia, and in the media. It is also the dialect taught in schools, which elevates its status above other dialects that are not taught. The dialects not

taught in schools include home dialects of some students. Not only is standard English taught in schools, but it is required that students adopt and use the dialect in order to meet language competencies for high school. If students do not successfully adopt and use the dialect, they will not meet some of the standards in the language strand and will be penalized in their ELA courses. This standard is located under the heading entitled “Conventions of Standard English.” All four of the ELA strands contain headings that are intended to organize the standards. Conventions of this particular dialect are included in the standards, but other commonly used regional and cultural dialects in the U.S. are excluded from instruction. Even the term “standard English” implies that this dialect is “normal” and that all non-standard dialects are not acceptable for use.

On the “How to Read the Standards” page, the writer provide additional detail about how to interpret the language strand under the heading “Language: Convention, effective use, and vocabulary.” The first sentence states: “The Language standards include the essential ‘rules’ of standard written and spoken English, but they also approach language as a matter of craft and informed choice among alternatives” (“How to Read the Standards”). It is clear that standard English is treated differently than other dialects on this page. First, the writers indicate that the language strand includes “the essential ‘rules’” of standard English, while not stating precise “alternatives” students may use. Names for other dialects do exist, but none of them appear here; the only term used is “alternative.” The connotation of this word suggests that standard English is the normal, authoritative dialect and other dialects are labeled “alternative” – nonstandard, unconventional, different, Other. Additionally, the authors’ claim that students “approach language as a matter of craft and informed choice among alternatives,” does not appear to be the case when I examine the language strand. The language strand for grades 9-12 requires that

students master standard English, but the strand does not require mastery of any other dialect. Therefore, the term standard English has an authoritative status, which allows it to effectively marginalize other dialects and certain home discourses of students entering public schools. This may not have been the intention of the CCSS writers, but it is certainly the effect.

DAVID COLEMAN AS AGENT – LANGUAGE USE

David Coleman, who studied philosophy and English literature, would have used standard English during his academic career. This dialect would have been emphasized at the universities he attended (Yale, Cambridge, and Oxford), as they are highly reputable academic institutions. Now, Coleman uses standard English in his professional career as a former consultant and current CEO of College Board. Because of his academic and professional background, he chose to privilege the dialect he considers most important for economic success. Perhaps unintentionally, he also is privileging the dialect of the dominant culture. Although dialects are not literacies or discourses, they certainly help to perpetuate literacies and discourses, as they affect people’s ability to master secondary uses of language, enter discourse communities, and meaningfully participate in social networks.

SUSAN PIMENTEL AS AGENT – BACKGROUND

The second lead writer of the CCSS, Susan Pimentel, is a co-founder of StandardsWork, an organization that describes itself as “a nonprofit education consultancy has been working hand-in-hand with school districts, state agencies and civic groups around the country to improve student achievement” (“Board of Directors”). StandardsWork has been involved in assisting districts to implement the Common Core. Pimentel’s profile indicates she has a Bachelor of Science degree in early childhood education, as well as a law degree from Cornell University (“Board of Directors”). When she worked for a school district in Maryland, her “efforts resulted

in the phase-out of student tracking, an enriched core curricula, advances in school-site management, and a results-based school accountability program” (“Board of Directors”).

Because she was interested in core curricula, it is unsurprising that Pimentel was involved in the writing and implementation of the Common Core State Standards. She is credited as being “the lead writer for the English Language Arts and Literacy Standards” (“Board of Directors”) of the Common Core, despite the fact that her academic background does not include a degree that specializes in literacy.

Pimentel’s early childhood education degree probably affords her some knowledge of teaching literacies, but a specialization in literacy or a reading endorsement are important qualifications for writing standards intended to be applied nationwide. Pimentel’s academic and professional background also suggests that she is accustomed to using standard English in classrooms and in the workplace. Choosing to privilege this dialect was most likely a comfortable decision for both her and Coleman, since standard English is integrally tied to their working lives. Additionally, they probably found this dialect to prepare students well for college and careers, since it is a privileged dialect in many academic and workplace contexts. The decision to match school instruction with dominant practices illustrates a privileging of the hegemony.

STANDARD 12: CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1

The last standard I have chosen to analyze appears in the speaking and listening strand for grades 9 and 10: “Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.” The corresponding standard for grades 11 and 12 is identical, with the exception of “grades 11-12

topics” instead of “grades 9-10 topics.” This standard emphasizes student collaboration with peers, which is beneficial for student learning. Lev Vygotsky’s social development theory posits “that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition” (Mbaye). Social interaction is required in this standard, as students must collaborate with one another to “build on others’ ideas” and express “their own clearly and persuasively.” This valuable interaction may help students construct knowledge in ways not available to them through independent work. In this way, the standard is useful for student learning and can assist students in learning how to effectively communicate with one another. One ambiguous part of the standard is the phrase “with diverse partners.” The meaning of this phrase is unclear and is open to interpretation for the reader. Does the meaning of “diverse” apply to race, ethnicity, or sex? Does it refer to diversity of academic performance (mixing low and high achieving students)? Does it refer to diversity of academic ability (pairing students who have IEPs, 504s, or learning disabilities with those who do not)? The phrase is ambiguous, which leaves teachers guessing at the authors’ intentions.

It is interesting to note that the speaking and listening strand is the only ELA strand that includes collaboration. The reading, writing, and language strands require students to engage only in individual tasks. It is curious that the reading, writing, and language strands do not require collaboration, as theory tells us that all literacy activities are socially constructed. Theoretically, it would seem appropriate to acknowledge the socially constructed and situated nature of literacy in all four Common Core strands, not only speaking and listening. Since collaboration appears in only one strand of the ELA Standards, we can conclude that there is an emphasis on individual work and learning. The expectation that students complete tasks individually is explicitly stated on the “Students Who are College and Career Ready in Reading,

Writing, Speaking, Listening, & Language” page of the Common Core. The seven descriptions listed on this page are intended to “offer a portrait of students who meet the standards set out in this document” (“Students Who are College and Career Ready in Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, & Language”).

The first characteristic listed is the following: “They demonstrate independence.” While the order of the characteristics may be arbitrary, “they demonstrate independence” is the first attribute the audience will see. There is a paragraph below this statement that explains how students should exhibit independence in all four strands. The paragraph does not, however, address the importance of collaborative work or student interaction. In fact, none of the other six characteristics on the page include the word “collaboration” (or a synonym), suggesting that independence is considered to be more important than collaboration for college and career readiness. Ironically, in order to be prepared for colleges and careers, students need to know how to collaborate with one another in a variety of literacy tasks, since collaboration is valued in many workplaces.

The page also describes these seven descriptions as “capacities of the literate individual” (“Students Who are College and Career Ready in Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, & Language”). Does this mean literate individuals only have these seven characteristics? Does this mean these are only seven characteristics (of many) that literate individuals possess? It appears that the definition of a “literate individual” includes the ability to complete work individually, but it does not include the ability to work collaboratively with peers. The conceptualization of a literate individual, according to the Common Core authors, is one who can read, write, speak, and listen effectively individually; this conceptualization of literacy contradicts what theory indicates about literacy and literate individuals. Not only does the ability to work independently

have a privileged place in the standards, but it is also used to separate those who are considered “literate” from those considered “illiterate.”

COLORADO SAMPLE CURRICULUM

In addition to these twelve Common Core Standards, there is a related document worthy of examination. In the fall of 2012, “over 500 Colorado educators, representing 61 school districts, participated in curriculum design workshops that resulted in the creation of 670 curriculum samples based on the Colorado Academic Standards” (“Colorado’s District Sample Curriculum Projects”). These teachers made sample curricula for ten academic subjects “as a way to understand and translate the state standards into curriculum” (“Colorado’s District Sample Curriculum Projects”). This document provides information for administrators, curriculum specialists, and teachers that help connect specific curricular options to the Common Core. The document provides the following: inquiry questions and connections between them and the CCSS strands; overarching concepts that connect to CCSS strands; what students will understand in a given unit; and guiding questions for the unit (Gallegos, Henderson, and Rael). The Colorado Department of Education made the sample curricula for Reading, Writing, and Communicating available online in January 2013. The title “Reading, Writing, and Communicating” aligns with the English Language Arts standards of the Common Core.

These sample curricula are not aligned with the Common Core State Standards, but they are aligned with the Colorado Academic Standards. Since Colorado has chosen to adopt the Common Core and still meet the Colorado Academic Standards, the sample curricula are useful documents for districts. Since I am using the Colorado sample curriculum to supplement my primary analysis, I am only going to examine one document of the sample. The entire sample curricula for Reading, Writing, and Communicating include one sample document for each grade

level; I will only examine the document for grade 12. I chose grade 12 because it illustrates expectations for students entering college and careers, which is the explicit purpose of the Common Core.

The grade 12 document is modeled after the skills and literacies emphasized in the Colorado Academic Standards, which means that the three teachers who designed the sample (Jessica Castillo Gallegos, Tara Henderson, and Kimba Rael) were following standards already written and adopted by Colorado. Therefore, the content they chose to include was restricted by the standards already in place. When looking at the document, I made a list of all authors, texts, and references to individuals. I discovered that the document included the following information:

Authors: Aristotle, Jonathan Swift, and Mark Twain

Titles: *The Kite Runner*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Beowulf*, and *Harry Potter*

References to Individuals (two approaches to argumentation): Rogerian and Toulmin models

This data reveals a similar privileging of Western, white, male authors seen in the Common Core State Standards. The breakdown of percentages with this information can be seen below:

Western authors / texts / models: $9 / 10 = 90\%$

White authors / texts / models: $8 / 9$ (*Beowulf* unknown so it was excluded from total; classifying Khaled Hosseini as non-white) = $\approx 89\%$

Male authors / texts / models: $8 / 9$ (*Beowulf* unknown so it was excluded from total) = $\approx 89\%$

Overwhelmingly, the authors, texts, and models of argumentation included in the sample curriculum are Western, white, and male. This reinforces the hegemonic, patriarchal discourse being perpetuated in the Common Core. Most of the names and titles above are used in examples

to convey the authors' points, and only three names appear in a greater capacity. Aristotle, Carl Rogers, and Stephen Toulmin are individuals who appear in guiding questions for units.

On page two of the document, one of the Reading, Writing, and Communicating standards listed for a unit on perspectives requires students to understand that “effective research strengthens the rhetoric used to communicate and respond to question(s)” (Gallegos, Henderson, and Rael). The factual guiding question for this standard is: “What are the components of Aristotle’s definition of rhetoric” (Gallegos, Henderson, and Rael)? If districts or teachers decide to use this guiding question, instruction on Aristotelian rhetoric will need to be provided. Even if this question is not used, the inclusion of rhetoric in both the Colorado Academic Standards and Common Core refers to the Western conceptualization of rhetoric. Well-known rhetoricians, who most likely include Aristotle, will need to be taught. Later in the document, page ten describes a unit on exploring truth. One of the Colorado Academic Standards being met in this unit is the following: “Ethical arguments take into account opposing viewpoints and transparently/accurately employ information and resources” (Gallegos, Henderson, and Rael). One of the conceptual guiding questions for this objective asks students to consider “How could the Rogerian and Toulmin approaches to argument analysis and formation incorporate opposing viewpoints” (Gallegos, Henderson, and Rael)? In order for students to answer this question, instruction and mastery of both argumentation models would be necessary. By listing Aristotle, Rogers, and Toulmin in the guiding questions, the writers have given these rhetoricians a privileged position in the sample curriculum. Additionally, all three of these individuals are Western male rhetoricians, which gives rhetoric a unique status in the document. Instead of privileging literature, essayists, or other authors, rhetoricians are the privileged individuals.

In the CCSS, Aristotle, Rogers, and Toulmin are not mentioned. Although their names do not appear, their influence is apparent to anyone who is familiar with their work. For example, the writing strand for 11th and 12th grades requires appropriate organization, logical progression, and stylistic features for writing tasks in the following standard: “produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience” (“Writing Grade 11-12”). Although this seems simplistic, classical rhetorical features are embedded in several places. Students are expected to develop their writing, which includes incorporating “the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples” to pieces of writing. Additionally, proper organization is outlined in the CCSS; papers should include a distinct introduction, development of ideas (in body paragraphs, although that term is not used), and a conclusion. Furthermore, arguments should contain “precise, knowledgeable claim(s), [...] the significance of the claim(s), [...] the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and [...] an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence” (“Writing Grade 11-12”). Claims, reasons, evidence, counterclaims, and a logical sequence are all emphasized here.

Lastly, style is also mentioned; it includes “precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy” (“Writing Grade 11-12”). Through these examples, one can see that certain rhetorical features of writing are emphasized in the CCSS writing strand. These rhetorical features can be traced to significant rhetoricians; rhetoric’s consistent appearance in the Common Core demonstrates its privileged place in attempting to make students college and career ready. Although I only provided a few examples of rhetoric’s place in the CCSS, there are many other examples including: tailoring writing for various audiences and using appropriate tools to create written products.

IMPLICIT MOTIVE 1

Based on the last six standards I analyzed, as well as the Colorado sample curriculum, it seems that one of the implicit motives of the CCSS writers is to privilege a Western, hegemonic, and patriarchal discourse because this discourse is closely tied to economic interests. If students are to be prepared for college and the workplace, they need to be highly experienced in dominant literacies and discourses; otherwise, they might not be as valuable economically. Although David Coleman and Susan Pimentel lack expertise in literacy, their own academic and professional backgrounds have undoubtedly shaped the construction of the ELA Standards. Although this may be unintended, the privileging of a dominant discourse upholds the status quo while continuing to marginalize non-dominant literacies and discourses.

RHETORICAL ANALYSIS: MOTIVE 2

COMMON CORE'S MODEL OF LITERACY

Since this project explores privileged literacies in the CCSS, it is important to examine the Common Core's literacy model holistically. As indicated earlier, there are four English Language Arts strands: reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. All four of these strands are integral to helping students become fully literate in public school classrooms. Additionally, both written and oral literacies require "all participants to establish, through an orchestration of language and shared knowledge, a publicly" established context "by which meaning can be constituted" ("Social Foundations of Reading and Writing" 120). In order for literacies to be effectively integrated in this model, shared contexts in local settings (classrooms) must be established. Student success in navigating their literacy tasks can be facilitated by this publicly established and acknowledged context.

Before I describe how the authors characterize their approach to literacy, I would like to consider the order of the strands. The order of the stands provided above is used in all instances where all four strands are listed. Perhaps reading and writing appear first and second, respectively, because they are competencies normally associated with Language Arts classrooms. On the other hand, speaking and listening may traditionally have appeared in Language Arts classrooms or separate speech classes. Since it is now being completely integrated into ELA standards, speaking and listening has a place in the strands, but it always appears third on that list. Maintaining this particular order of the strands implies a hierarchy, although the writers of the CCSS would probably disagree. Because reading always appears first, it could be interpreted to be the most important strand. If the strands were listed in a different order, I think a different

hierarchy would be implied. Below, figures 4 shows the current order of the strands on the Common Core document, and figure 5 shows the strands in the opposite order.

Reading: Literature
Reading: Informational Text
Reading: Foundational Skills
Writing
Speaking & Listening
Language

Figure 4

Language
Speaking & Listening
Writing
Reading: Foundational Skills
Reading: Informational Text
Reading: Literature

Figure 5

Figure 4 appears in the upper-left hand corner of every ELA Standards page, which means it is probably referred to frequently as users navigate through the strands. Since we read lists from top to bottom, readers will always see reading first, then writing, then speaking and listening, and finally language. If the order in figure 5 were used instead, a different privileging of literacies might be implied. The current ordering suggests that reading and writing (written literacies) are privileged over speaking and listening (oral literacies).

Even though the strands divide literacies into distinct categories, the “Key Design Consideration” page asserts that the Common Core uses “an integrated model of literacy” (“Key Design Consideration”). This may seem contradictory, as the separation of literacies into distinct strands exists within an integrated framework of literacy. The authors explain that the standards are divided into specific strands for conceptual clarity, but the “processes of communication are closely connected” (“Key Design Consideration”). This integrated model is appropriate for the

standards because “in many literacy events there is a mixture of written and spoken language” (Barton and Hamilton 9). As Barton and Hamilton indicate, these tasks generally do not occur in isolation; instead, literacy events usually involve an intersection of multiple literacies. On the same page, another heading entitled “Focus and coherence in instruction and assessment” reiterates the integrated model approach by stating: “each standard need not be a separate focus for instruction and assessment. Often, several standards can be addressed by a single rich task” (“Key Design Consideration”). An example of this would be the requirement that students use standard English when writing expository essays; this task would involve meeting standards in both the language and writing strands. This example illustrates an acknowledgement of literacies being closely connected, but I think the current organization of the standards highlights the separation of literacies rather than the integration of them.

Since the literacies are separated into several strands, their intersections must be facilitated by teachers themselves. While this provides teachers more autonomy in their lesson planning, teachers who are not well versed in literacy research might not understand the significance of integrating the strands on a daily basis. Although the “Key Design Consideration” page includes a few paragraphs on the integrated model of literacy used in the Common Core, the separation of strands occurs on every page of the ELA Standards. This suggests that the separation of strands is much more visible than the explanation of the integrated approach. The benefit of separating the literacies into strands is, as mentioned above, for “conceptual clarity.” The writers of the CCSS wanted to separate the literacies for organizational purposes, as teachers use the Common Core most often when selecting standards that match their lesson plans. Since this was probably the impetus for the decision, I agree that these categories are appropriate and helpful for schoolteachers. The potential issue I see with separating them is the possible

privileging of certain literacies over others. For example, because of the order of the strands, one might think that written literacies are more important to meet than oral literacies. This creates division among the strands, rather than supporting the integrated model of literacy the writers intended.

THE GREAT DIVIDE

The privileging of written over oral literacies was characteristic of the “Great Divide” conversations during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Scholars during this time researched oral and written literacies, making broad claims about oral and literate societies. Some of this early research has been valuable for discussing human consciousness, but much of it is controversial and problematic because of its biases. The “Great Divide” theory of Walter Ong, Jack Goody, and David Olson argued that oral literacy and written literacy are fundamentally different (Brandt and Clinton 339). The “Great Divide” theorists espoused that written literacy was connected to higher cognitive processes, whereas oral cultures were cognitively less advanced. This cognitive difference accounts for the belief that those immersed in oral literacy were considered “savages” and those a part of literate cultures were considered “civilized” (Handsfield and Jimenez 177). Of course, these ethnographies were later criticized for being culturally biased and Western-centered. The “Great Divide” theorists defended the superiority of written literacy because they believed literacy “marks the great divide between advanced, complex cultures and traditional ones” (Daniell 395). Brian Street, an anthropologist, calls this “Great Divide” the “autonomous model” because it depicts literacy as acontextual and ahistorical, completely disconnected from culture (as cited in Daniell, 1999, p. 395). He heavily criticized the implication that “literate people were more cognitively and culturally advanced than nonliterate people” (Daniell 395). He also objected “to the ideological innocence that these theorists

ascribed to the technology of literacy, arguing that literacy cannot be extricated from structures of power in which it always operates” (Daniell 395).

Psychologists Scribner and Cole in 1981 conducted an ethnographic study about the Vai people of Liberia (Kelder). They challenged the “Great Divide” theory and attempted to “tease out the intricate and complex relationships between cognition and written language to determine what if any were the supposed cognitive effects of literacy acquisition” (Kelder). Their results questioned “the assumption that literacy automatically contributed to cognitive development across content domains and learning contexts,” thus disrupting the “Great Divide” universal beliefs regarding oral and written literacies (Kelder). This new social-practice perspective was significant because it helped to break “down the oral-literate binary in which talking and writing appeared as formally and functionally distinct systems” (Brandt and Clinton 348). It is now universally accepted in English studies that those living in oral societies are not cognitively inferior to those living in written societies. Dominant literacies in any society are embedded in power structures that perpetuate ideals and values; for this reason, knowledge-making cannot be separated from dominant discourses in a given society (whether oral or written).

Since research tells us that written literacy is not superior to oral literacy, there should be no privileging of one over the other in the Common Core. However, an examination of what is contained in all four strands shows otherwise. The speaking and listening strand is divided into two organizational headings: comprehension and collaboration, and presentation of knowledge and ideas (“Speaking & Listening Grade 9-10”). This strand includes class discussion, working in groups, giving formal presentations, and assessing peers’ formal presentations (“Speaking & Listening Grade 9-10”). These activities require oral literacy, but I would argue that written literacy is also embedded in these standards. For example, students are required to “Come to

discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study” (“Speaking & Listening Grade 9-10”). The connection of oral and written literacy is useful, as it demonstrates that students are not expected master these literacies in isolation. However, there seems to be an inequality in comparing this strand to the reading and writing strands. The reading and writing strands require mastery of written literacy only, whereas the speaking and listening strand requires mastery of both written and oral literacy. It seems to me that written literacy is being privileged over oral literacy when comparing the strands. This inequality is unfortunate particularly because oral communication is one of the primary means of communication in both colleges and careers. On the other hand, I can understand why some speaking and listening tasks would depend on comprehension and analysis of written material.

IMPLICIT MOTIVE 2: CORPORATE PROFIT

I do not think it is coincidental that reading and writing are also the competencies assessed on standardized tests, while speaking and listening are not assessed. As aforementioned, reading and writing tasks are embedded in all four strands, which means they are probably emphasized daily. More instruction time is devoted to reading and writing tasks (since they are embedded in all four strands) than speaking and listening tasks (since they appear in only one strand). It must be noted that reading, writing, speaking, and listening all occur with great frequency in an English Language Arts classroom regularly, but more time is probably used assessing reading and writing tasks, due to them being embedded in all four Common Core strands. Additionally, more time is spent during classroom instruction on reading and writing tasks, as teachers devote time to preparing students for standardized reading and writing examinations. Speaking and listening tasks are not assessed on standardized assessments.

When we examine the list of companies, foundations, and organizations involved in the creation and implementation of the Common Core, there are a few interesting observations. First,

Achieve Incorporated is a company that manages the PARCC consortium (“What We Do”). The PARCC exams are standardized tests that are aligned with the Common Core State Standards. Eighteen states are already a part of the PARCC consortium, which means that all public school students in these states will take the PARCC tests. Because of this widespread implementation, the PARCC exams will generate a large amount of profit for Achieve Incorporated. Additionally, organizations that fund Achieve Incorporated will benefit from the profits; these organizations include the Lumina Foundation, State Farm, The Walton Family Foundation, and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). Second, the PARCC website lists the contracts it has with various companies, which are “funded by PARCC’s grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Race to the Top Assessment Program” (“Contracts and Procurement”). These contracts are used for the “development, testing, and technology necessary to support the PARCC assessment system” (“Contracts and Procurement”). One of the contracts listed as “state technology needs assessment” was awarded to Pearson Incorporated and Smarter Balanced. Another contract entitled “item development” was awarded to the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and Pearson (“Contracts and Procurement”).

Pearson Incorporated will profit from these contracts (“My View of the Common Core Standards”). Because reading and writing tasks are privileged over oral literacy in the Common Core (as reading and writing are embedded in all four strands), textbook and testing companies have an opportunity to capitalize on the privileged literacies. I do not mean to provide an indictment of certain companies or individuals, but I do hope to provide additional context of the Common Core so we might fully understand the motivation behind the writing and implementation of the standards.

The last observation we can make is in regards to David Coleman’s relationship with the Common Core over time. He acted as a lead writer for the ELA Standards, and he now serves as the CEO of College Board, which is a company funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (“The College Board Annual Philanthropic Stewardship Report”). College Board is responsible for operating the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and Advanced Placement (AP) tests, among others. College Board has already published a report that details SAT test alignment with the Common Core State Standards (“Common Core State Standards Alignment”). This change will allow College Board to create standardized tests that align with one set of common standards. Tailoring their tests in this way will save the company money and increase their profits. Although these corporate connections to the Common Core might be coincidental, I think it is quite likely that written literacy (reading and writing tasks) are privileged in the Common Core so that textbook and testing companies could profit from the standardization. One might argue that if we value the writers’ methods of accountability, then some companies will naturally be responsible for textbook and standardized test alignment. While some companies will need to be contracted to do this work, I find it suspect that the organizations, foundations, companies, and individuals involved in the creation of the Common Core are also those who stand to profit from it.

For example, Pearson Incorporated, a textbook company, was involved in the creation of the Common Core aligned classroom materials. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation funded “Pearson’s program to create online courses and resources for the standards” (“My View of the Common Core Standards”). Additionally, the company has acquired valuable contracts to develop and distribute the PARCC exams. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation partnered with Pearson Charitable Foundation, the nonprofit sister organization of Pearson Inc., in April

2011 to create “a full series of digital instructional resources” for implementing the Common Core (“Pearson Foundation Partners with Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to Create Digital Learning Programs”). However, in December 2013, Pearson Charitable Foundation was sued by New York Attorney General Eric T. Schneiderman and was ordered to pay \$7.7 million because “the foundation had created Common Core products to generate ‘tens of millions of dollars’” for Pearson Inc. (Layton). According to New York state law, non-profit groups may not participate in for-profit undertakings, which is why the company was fined. The partnership of the Gates Foundation with Pearson in the shaping of public education directly led to corporate profit. Pearson’s textbooks that are aligned with the Common Core are already available for purchase by schools, districts, and states (“Prentice Hall Literature Common Core Edition”). If making money from the Common Core was indeed the result of Pearson’s actions, I would also suggest that it was one of their motives from the beginning. Another implicit motive behind the Common Core appears to be the opportunity for certain companies and foundations to profit from CCSS implementation. The level of corporate involvement in public education today, as well as the lack of public participation in the process of writing and adopting the Common Core, supports the idea that capitalist interests are being privileged over democratic ideals.

DISCUSSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENTS

Since the Common Core implementation is so widespread, a discussion about the standards' potential effects is warranted. In this chapter, I would like to examine how the Common Core might affect students and what the privileging of certain literacies and discourses means for students in public schools. In my literature review, I explored the notion that literacy is contextual. Because of its contextual nature, we can say that there are different literacies (Barton and Hamilton 10). More specifically, "literacies are coherent configurations of literacy practices" and "they are associated with particular aspects of cultural life" (Barton and Hamilton 10, 11). Literacies' connections with culture necessarily politicize them, and some literacies are perpetuated because of their perceived cultural value. Over time, because "literacy practices are as fluid, dynamic and changing as the lives and societies of which they are a part" we need to be able to adopt different literacies and utilize them in various contexts when appropriate (Barton and Hamilton 13). However, this task becomes difficult when there is a standardized set of literacies that are imposed upon groups of people.

To complicate matters, the notion of discourse communities and the existence of local contexts challenge the idea that a national set of standards is beneficial for all students. Is every classroom a different discourse community? Have the writers decided that they do not value the needs present in local contexts? Is a homogenous set of standards appropriate for such a diverse population of students? It seems problematic to have a national set of standards that reinforces certain literacies and discourses at the expense of others. The literacies privileged in the Common Core include literacy practices that the CCSS writers hope prepare students for college and careers; these literacy practices include reading analytically, producing expository writing,

producing persuasive writing, producing analytical writing, speaking persuasively, listening effectively, and using digital tools effectively. These literacy practices can greatly benefit students as they prepare for colleges and careers, but they also appear to be “universal, transferrable skills” when described in this manner. For this reason, the description of these literacy activities does not accurately capture the complexities of literacy, such as literacy being socially constructed and context dependent. The discourse that is privileged in the Common Core is Western, hegemonic, and patriarchal.

POSTCOLONIAL THEORY

In order to contextualize my discussion on the effects of the Common Core, I would like to use a postcolonial framework. Postcolonial “studies has sought to expose the mechanisms of oppression through which ‘Others’ – aboriginal, native, or simply preexisting cultures and groups – are displaced, eradicated, enslaved, or transformed into obedient subjects” (Lunsford and Ouzgane 1). The term “Othering” will be important to this discussion, as I will argue that certain literacies and discourses not Western are Othered by the Common Core. Typically, postcolonial theory examines power relations that exist between the West (the colonizer) and peoples of invaded lands (the colonized). Although I am not discussing colonization in the geographic sense and am not exploring power relations between Western countries and invaded lands, I am considering how this educational reform measure functions as a colonizing tool. This definition also allows us “to mount a stringent critique of the specifically imperialist subject” (Lunsford and Ouzgane 1). By examining the colonizer with a critical eye, we may be able to see more fully how the imperialist displaces, silences, and transforms colonized subjects. If we use this definition, postcolonial study can be broadly conceptualized as “a time, a space, the emblematically philosophic rupture with European modernity; it is a moment, a movement, a

method, a message, a mirage, a misnomer because the colonial moment repeats” (Bahri 74). The effects of colonization continue long after the act of colonization ends, as colonial power continues to manifest in forms of institutional and structural oppression for the colonized. Colonial power extends far beyond literal colonial sites. In this way, we can use postcolonial theory to explore how the Western colonial tradition manifests in new contexts and sites of power, one of which is U.S. public education. Through widespread implementation of the Common Core and rigid assessment of certain skills, the Common Core has the potential to colonize students by propagating a Western, colonial discourse that must be mastered in order to succeed academically.

Triplett describes Gergen’s characterization of social constructionism as involving language that “serves to sustain and support certain patterns to the exclusion of others” (as cited in Triplett, 2007, p. 96). This theory can be applied to classroom settings, as certain language patterns are privileged in instruction. Since language patterns are political, students are inscribed into particular discourses through their use of these patterns in classroom contexts. When students enter school, they are exposed to “the power of our classroom texts to indoctrinate students, often through students’ own complicity, into particular ideological perspectives” (Olson 91). Indoctrination into particular ideologies usually benefits people in power (rather than the students), as they are the ones who control what language patterns and discourses are perpetuated. According to Gee, “discourses are inherently ‘ideological’” and involve particular values; by privileging certain discourses in public schools, classrooms become spaces where specific values (perhaps contrary to students’ beliefs, perhaps not) are reinforced (“What is Literacy?” 538). When certain discourses are privileged in classrooms, it always occurs at the

expense of other discourses. This becomes particularly problematic when classrooms contain diverse populations.

bell hooks notes: “As the classroom becomes more diverse, teachers are faced with the way the politics of domination are often reproduced” (hooks 39). The cultural majority, those in power, are the ones who have the ability to participate in this domination – and it happens in schools through the propagation of certain ideologies and the perpetuation of discourses. These actions serve to indoctrinate students into the majority’s discourse, which effectively Others non-dominant discourses and marginalizes students whose home discourses do not match the majority’s discourse. Giroux suggests that we consider “how we might restructure school curricula in order to address the needs of those groups who traditionally have been excluded from the dominant educational discourse” (“Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference” 1). Groups that have been excluded, among others, include African Americans, Chicanos, Native Americans, students of color, immigrants, and females. These marginalized groups must adopt and participate in the discourse of the Western, white colonizer. Their mastery of the discourse is required to demonstrate proficiency in a set of standards also developed by white Westerners. Critical pedagogy calls for a space that welcomes critical inquiry about systems of power themselves. Critical educators understand the necessity of “engaging and often unlearning the habits of institutional (as well as racial, gender, and class-specific) privilege that buttress their own power” (“Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference” 3). This pedagogy gives critical educators the opportunity to challenge this Western, hegemonic, oppressive discourse that effectively indoctrinates public school students into the dominant ideology.

The reason why the CCSS is problematic in this regard can be supported by one of Foucault's observations:

power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); [...] power and knowledge directly imply one another; [...] there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (Foucault 175)

The writers of the CCSS are the ones who determine what knowledge is valuable and worthy of learning; they are the ones with the power to dictate which literacies and discourses are privileged in public schools. Since the writers of the CCSS English Language Arts have chosen to privilege a Western, hegemonic discourse, all other knowledge from non-dominant discourses are essentially de-valued, making them easy to Other. The knowledge associated with non-dominant discourses then has no power in literacies and discourses reinforced in public schools.

ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT PUBLIC SCHOOLING

There are several assumptions associated with public education in general, which probably did not influence the writing of the Common Core but speak to the larger educational context in which the Common Core operates. hooks makes an observation about college classrooms, but it is also applicable to public school classrooms: "In those rare cases where it is acknowledged that students and professors do not share the same class backgrounds, the underlying assumption is still that we are all equally committed to getting ahead, to moving up the ladder of success to the top" (hooks 177). This assumption may be true in certain educational contexts, but it is not true for all students in all contexts. This assumption underlies the stated motive of the Common Core, but perhaps all students do not want to be college and career ready. Or perhaps they want to resist the discourse in which they are being indoctrinated because they have no power in it. Or perhaps they are simply unmotivated. The assumption that all students

“are equally committed to getting ahead” helps to provide justification for certain educational reforms measures, including the Common Core, but it is misguided. The writers of the Common Core made the decision to privilege “college and career readiness” *for* the general public, rather than *with* the general public.

Shirley Brice Heath’s study of “Roadville” and “Trackton” residents offers a glimpse into the lives of townspeople, and their experiences challenge the assumption implicit in the Common Core that all students should be ready for “college and careers.” This blanket expectation gives the impression that all students must be prepared in the same ways for the same futures. Heath indicates that beyond their home and community lives, Roadville and Trackton residents “have few occasions for reading and writing on the job” (Heath 233). The students in these two working class communities have different needs than students in other areas. The students’ future work prospects, which may entail working in textile mills or on farms, will impact what students need to learn in school. Although this study took place before the implementation of the Common Core, communities like Roadville and Trackton still exist, and the Common Core will apply to them, as well. There seems to be a disconnect between what the writers of the Common Core envision – to make students literate in particular ways (and to prepare them for college) – and what students actually need for their own diverse futures. Some working class positions do not require the literacies emphasized in the Common Core, which reinforces the idea that what students learn in controlled, isolated, and artificial classroom contexts might not transfer to contexts in the real world.

OTHERING AND MULTICULTURALISM

bell hooks expands on her experience in school, which is not representative of all students but may provide insight into the experience of other marginalized students. hooks

learned that schools assumed “any student coming from a poor or working-class background would willingly surrender all values and habits of being associated with this background” (hooks 182). If it is the assumption that when students enter public school and involuntarily subscribe to the CCSS that they will readily surrender their home values and discourses, then they also endure the effects of colonization at the hands of dominant oppressors. This kind of surrendering entails a complete erasure of certain values in order to adopt the values being perpetuated at school. These values are normally associated with white, middle-class backgrounds. Surrendering these values and habits involves a change in identity, which is deeply problematic. In hooks’s case, she and her classmates were “encouraged, as many students are today, to betray [their] class origins. Rewarded if [they] chose to assimilate, estranged if [they] chose to maintain those aspects of who [they] were, some were all too often seen as outsiders” (hooks 182). This narrative applies to students who will attend public schools in the Common Core era, even though hooks’s experience was decades ago. For example, students are required to use Western rhetorical elements in their writing, and if they choose not to, they will not do well on their assessments. They are also required to use standard English when writing or speaking, and if they choose not to, they will be penalized. The requirement that students assimilate to the dominant discourse is necessary if students want to succeed academically.

Those who think that the Common Core supports diversity might point out one of the characteristics of “college and career ready students” on one of the Introduction pages. There are a total of seven characteristics listed, and the seventh is: “They come to understand other perspectives and cultures” (“Students Who are College and Career Ready in Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, & Language”). Interestingly, the reason for encouraging this attribute is that students after graduation “must learn and work together” with “people from often widely

divergent cultures and who represent diverse experiences and perspectives” (“Students Who are College and Career Ready in Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, & Language”). Students are not encouraged to learn about other perspectives and cultures in order to increase tolerance, increase appreciation, or gain new understandings. They simply have “to learn and work together” with people who are different from them. Based on the authors and texts suggested in the Common Core, it appears that “other perspectives and cultures” are not actually privileged. There is only one other location in the CCSS document that alludes to the notion of difference. On another Introduction page, the writers indicate that the Standards “include the essential ‘rules’ of standard written and spoken English, but they also approach language as a matter of craft and informed choice among alternatives” (“How to Read the Standards”). Standard English is emphasized with the option of using “alternatives” when appropriate; however, these alternatives are not provided anywhere in the Standards.

Although the CCSS writers may cite the above paragraphs as evidence that they value multiculturalism, the standards were written from a Western, white perspective. Any multicultural examination will occur from a white lens, rather than an inclusive, diverse lens with difference at the center. The term “multicultural” usually means “a generic name for the other by virtue of race, gender, sexuality, or physical ability, although the term itself would suggest a pluralism that ought not, at least conceptually, to exclude white culture” (Bahri 77). If we use this definition for multiculturalism, we first must determine who the Other is. In this case, the dominant discourse being perpetuated is Western, white, hegemonic, and patriarchal; discourses outside of this hegemonic one could be labeled Other. This includes discourses of the marginalized groups listed previously. Inclusion of the Other is scarce in the standards, as the

only two clear references to anything outside of the dominant discourse were stated in the aforementioned paragraph. hooks discusses public education broadly, asserting that “there is not nearly enough practical discussion of ways classroom settings can be transformed so that the learning experience is inclusive” despite the emphasis on multiculturalism in our country (hooks 35).

The solution is not to incorporate a few texts from African Americans, women, or Asian Americans and consider that to be multicultural. The classroom would still examine those texts from a Western, white perspective. The texts would still be read and analyzed in a discourse that is dominant, even if the texts themselves are not part of that discourse. This kind of an approach “is not an interrogation of the biases conventional canons (if not all canons) establish, but yet another form of tokenism” (hooks 39). Ironically, there is not much evidence to suggest that the inclusion of multicultural readings “produced within Anglo-America [...] have been successful in promoting greater tolerance and understanding, or even preparation for a diversifying global market” (Bahri78). They might even reinforce stereotypes of the Other and discourage students from engaging in true critical inquiry of the operation of power (Bahri 78).

In order to create a truly critical space, where students are critically thinking about what they read, they need to be provided opportunities to consider how texts are embedded in dominant power structures. This kind of a classroom, which genuinely supports multiculturalism, “forces us all to recognize our complicity in accepting and perpetuating biases of any kind” (hooks 44). Because of the stated purpose of the Common Core, I do not think the CCSS writers consider inquiry of biases to be valuable. Having students consider their complicity in perpetuating bias does not necessarily prepare students for their lives after graduation, so it is unsurprising that the writers of the CCSS do not share the goal of multiculturalism. It is possible

that the notions of difference and the Other exist in the margins of the Common Core because some conservatives “see it as a potent threat to Western civilization” (Bahri 77). By keeping difference in the margins, multiculturalism’s “threats are even more efficiently managed and contained” by those in power (Bahri 77). The implementation of critical pedagogy and centering of difference would have a greater chance of decentering the existing, dominant discourse.

CONTACT ZONES

Although a true multicultural classroom would be difficult to foster, since the Common Core perpetuates a discourse that does not privilege difference, diversity in classrooms is incredibly important. We can conceptualize the diversity that exists in classrooms as occurring within what Mary Louise Pratt has called “contact zones.” The definition of contact zone has been modified over time, and I will use Pratt’s definition that characterizes them as “social spaces where differing cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power” (as cited in Olson, 2004, p. 86). Wolff argues that these imaginary spaces usually involve one culture dominating another while it privileges itself (as cited in Hall and Rosner, 2004, p. 105). These political zones involve coercion, inequality, and conflict (Pratt qtd. in Olson 86). Some students are privileged because their home discourse matches what the school privileges; others, however, are not afforded this benefit. In a classroom setting, conflict arises when students’ home literacies and discourses do not match those of the school. Additionally, conflict can arise when students’ values and ways of knowing are not considered valid. Ways of knowing that are associated with certain cultural and social structures are privileged over ways of knowing, such as knowing from experience.

However, conflict is not necessarily negative, as long as it is used fruitfully to enrich students’ understandings of difference and invite them to critical inquiry of their and others’

perspectives. Jarratt paraphrases Weiler's characterization of conflict as not being "grounds for despair but the starting point for creating a consciousness in students and teachers through which the inequalities generating those conflicts can be acknowledged and transformed" (as cited in Olson, 2004, p. 94). In these cases, conflict can be the impetus for challenging inequalities. The contact zone, as it manifests in a classroom, can support the integration of postcolonial discourse, which is meant to "analyze and articulate the dynamics of systems of domination and oppression, to highlight 'difference' as an important, even central, aspect of political relations (be they on the micro or macrolevel), to focus, that is, on the crucial importance of Otherness" (Olson 87). This approach to difference has the potential to foster truly multicultural classrooms, where difference is valued and the critical inquiry of culture, perspectives, and power relations discourages students from Othering.

When students are exposed to contact zones in school settings, usually not by choice, their identities are affected. James Gee asserts that students "may face very real conflicts in terms of values and identities" (*An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 33). Any kind of encounter or interaction with the Other will most likely cause one to reflect on his or her own positionality and values. Gee provides an example of a study from 1981 (by Scollon and Scollon) in which students from a Native American group called the Athabaskans engaged in writing tasks at school (*An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 33). Gee points out that, for these students, essay writing constituted "a crisis in identity" (*An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 33). In order for Athabaskan students to write their essays successfully, they were required to "produce a major self-display, which is appropriate to Athabaskans only when a person is in a position of dominance in relation to the audience (in the case of school, this is the teacher, not the student)" (*An Introduction to Discourse Analysis* 33). In this example, students were required to engage in

a social practice that conflicted with their cultural norms. The classroom became a contact zone where certain cultural values were privileged over others; in this case, the classroom discourse operated at the expense of students' home discourses. The students either had to comply with the directive or dismiss it in order to retain their cultural values. When we examine this example broadly, we can see the potential problematic implications of Common Core implementation. When students from various backgrounds are expected to assimilate to the expectations and culture of the dominant majority, students risk losing parts of their identities.

Another example is provided in Gloria Anzaldúa's influential book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. In this book, Gloria Anzaldúa describes the experiences of herself and her culture of being oppressed by Western, white power structures. In the Chicano culture, "the welfare of the family, the community, and the tribe is more important than the welfare of the individual. The individual exists first as kin – as sister, as father, as *padrino* – the last as self" (Anzaldúa 40). Anzaldúa's collective, communal culture differs widely from the mainstream U.S. individualistic culture. When students from Chicano homes enter schools, which are aligned with the values of the mainstream culture, they might have difficulty assimilating to new ways of thinking and behaving. The emphasis on individual work in the Common Core suggests that students who come from backgrounds that do not privilege individualism will either have to assimilate to the values perpetuated by the Common Core or be unsuccessful in school. A standardized, universal set of standards being implemented nationwide will conflict with students' cultural and social norms, which will cause students to grapple with their own crises of identity.

COLONIZATION

The students who most likely struggle with the privileged literacies and discourse of the Common Core are students who belong to minority groups, since their discourses are not valued in the standards. This has far-reaching implications for students' identities, as well as for students' performances in school. Since accountability measures tied to the Common Core (and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act) require that students partake in standardized tests to assess their progress, students' abilities to acquire the privileged literacies and discourse in public schools is necessary for their academic career. Many times, passing test scores are needed for permission so that students can move to the next grade or can graduate from high school. Some students are better equipped for these tasks than others. Over time, a series of studies and scholars have shown the correlation between middle- or upper-class, white students succeeding in school, whereas lower class minorities typically struggle to succeed. In Purves's 1990 article "The Literacy Crisis: Whose Crisis is it?" the author posits that sometimes "literacy is equated with reading at a grade level on a test, which again is not accurate because the tests are often poorly normed" (Purves 2). This article was published over twenty years ago, and even during that time it was suggested that literacy tests are inaccurate assessments and are therefore invalid measurements of achievement. Then in 1998, Brandt in "Sponsors of Literacy" indicated that "a statistical correlation between high literacy achievement and high socioeconomic, majority-race status routinely shows up in results of national tests of reading and writing performance" ("Sponsors of Literacy" 170). Although correlation does not imply causation, there must be a reason for this correlation.

Additionally, this is a trend that has continued for decades and does not occur in isolated historical moments or isolated locations. The trend probably continued through the 1990s

because evidence-based outcomes were not addressing the real problem behind the “achievement gap.” A few years later, with the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act, “test preparations were creating contexts of struggle for the very students meant to be helped” by the legislation (Triplett 120). NCLB was intended to close the achievement gap among high socioeconomic, majority-race students and their low socioeconomic, minority-race counterparts. However, preparations for the necessary standardized tests were proving to be problematic for the students the law intended to help. In 2000, Willis and Harris “argued that when mainstream literacy assumptions continue to dominate school literacy contexts, nonmainstream students will continue to be unsuccessful in school literacy contexts” (as cited in Triplett, 2007, p. 119). This claim supports the idea that assumptions regarding literacy tend to privilege dominant literacy practices at the expense of nonmainstream or non-dominant literacy practices. Therefore, students who do not normally engage in the dominant literacy practices (usually minorities) are disadvantaged. Triplett’s findings echo Brandt’s assertion in that the students who struggled the most with reading, and were identified for reading intervention, had low socioeconomic status (Triplett 122). This troubling fact is further supported by studies conducted by Ladd (2012), Sirin (2005), and Tienken (2011), which found that students who have low socioeconomic status “never achieve a higher mean score than non-economically disadvantaged students on any state test, in any subject, at any grade level” (Tienken 309). These studies should be alarming, as they show a correlation between poverty and low achievement on standardized tests. The Common Core, if its implementation follows the existing track record of student achievement, might not positively impact student achievement. The new standards might continue to produce the same results, or even worse, cause a decline in achievement.

The Common Core has the potential to colonize students by upholding a Eurocentric attitude, which can be described as “the use of European culture as the standard to which all other cultures are negatively contrasted” (Tyson 366). It may not seem that other cultures are negatively depicted in the standards, and indeed, there is no overt discrimination present. However, a Eurocentric model privileges Western authors and texts while marginalizing “other cultures,” which certainly exists in the Common Core. As I illustrated in the rhetorical analysis chapters, the vast majority of suggested or required readings in the ELA strands belong to Western, white males. This places “other cultures” on the margins or boundaries of classroom instruction.

In addition to texts that are used, the very discourse that students operate in is heavily influenced by the Western (Greek) model of rhetoric, which privileges a certain way of constructing texts, at the expense of other possibilities outside of the Western model. The aim of the colonists, which in this case are the designers and implementers of the Common Core, “is to ‘civilize’ the savage, to introduce him to all the benefits of Western culture” (JanMohamed 62). While I do not think “civilizing the savage” was the intention of the Common Core writers, it is one of the implications of this education reform measure. In perpetuating a Western discourse, everything that Westerners traditionally associate with their culture, including civility, is also maintained and transmitted through the privileged discourse. Gloria Anzaldúa’s book itself is an act of resistance, as it uses the dominant language and subversive languages to critique the power of white America. Anzaldúa claims that “the only ‘legitimate’ inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites” (Anzaldúa 26). It is through her oppression that Anzaldúa has been able to understand who has cultural and social power in this country, since it is usually through one’s oppression that another’s privileges are made visible. It is also

through her positionality that she is able to see the power that men have and women lack. Culture transmits dominant paradigms that exist as unquestionable, and “culture is made by those in power – men. Males make the rules and laws; women transmit them” (Anzaldúa 38).

Traditionally, men have had more power than women in creating rules and laws, which gives them the ability to construct the dominant paradigms that are transmitted through culture.

Anzaldúa provides an example of this by showing how the construction of “we are Chicanas” exists in the masculine, even though it may refer to women. The term “Chicanas *se nosotros*” contains a masculine ending, and if it refers to women, it robs them of their “female being by the masculine plural. Language is a male discourse” (Anzaldúa 76). Although the rules of the English language differ, language’s political nature allows it to transmit the dominant ideologies, discourses, and paradigms associated with Western culture, which are shaped by men.

Relating this to the Common Core illustrates that the writers of the standards, which include both men and women, participate in the transmission of the dominant discourse; this discourse was first created by Western, white men. This becomes problematic when the transmission of certain cultural ideals is privileged at the expense of others. When minority students are enculturated into the dominant discourse, they are considered more “civilized” as their home discourses are silenced and erased in the classroom. The U.S. has accomplished colonization in two primary ways, according to Louise Rodríguez Connal. Connal asserts that the “assimilation of immigrants and conquest of territories in war” have contributed to U.S. colonization (Connal 200). A very effective, albeit clandestine, method of colonization is through the coerced assimilation of immigrants. If we view the practice of assimilation in public schools, especially with the implementation of the Common Core, we can see that students are required to participate in and master the discourse of the Western, white hegemony. Students

who are not immigrants, but are members of minority groups, also belong in this category. For example, Native American and African American students typically belong to communities that have cultures distinct from the dominant culture. When they enter school, the dominant culture is privileged, which means that they must adopt new ways of communicating and thinking in order to be successful in school environments. By contrast, students from the dominant majority enter school already familiar with dominant cultural norms and literacy practices, which places them at an advantage.

One way schools assimilate students is by using “the book” in order to control the colonized. Homi Bhabha argues that “the discovery of the English book establishes both a measure of mimesis and a mode of civil authority and order” (Bhabha 149). Olson expands on Bhabha’s claim by asserting that the book is “an instrument of control of colonized peoples because it carries with it a logocentric and ‘civilizing’ power that displaces the subaltern’s authority of experience” (Olson 90). Books written in a Western paradigm, intended to preserve Western discourses, have the potential to discredit the ways of knowing of the colonized. This leads to Othering of cultural and social norms that are different from the dominant majority. Connal believes that this form of colonization, through controlling what is taught and determining what language will be used in teaching, “repeats the colonization of the lands, customs, and politics of the countries from which our ancestors came” (Connal 201). Public education serves to colonize students by indoctrinating them into the dominant discourse. This is accomplished by using the colonizer’s language, English, while excluding other languages from the standards and/or classroom instruction. The Common Core supports these practices, which means that the standards actively participate in the indoctrination of students. bell hooks describes her experience in classrooms “where styles of teaching reflected the notion of a single

norm of thought and experience, which we were encouraged to believe was universal” (hooks 35). According to hooks, a particular “norm of thought and experience” was reinforced, and students were led to believe that this norm was universal. However, the norm applied primarily to the dominant majority and did not encompass the realities and experiences of all students. hooks goes on to say that “the colonizing forces are so powerful in this white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” that people of color (she refers to blacks only) need to renew their desire to engage in decolonization. The term “white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” provides a framework for examining dominant power structures from a non-dominant point of view. I think this is an accurate term that describes the current dominant, hegemonic group that participated in the creation of the Common Core. The notion that there is “a single norm of thought and experience” still exists in today’s classrooms, through the privileging of certain discourses and silencing of others.

Perhaps the most striking example of this is through the teaching of standard English while ignoring the existence of other languages and dialects. Language is the centerpiece of all communication and is an important part of one’s identity, which makes the decisions surrounding language instruction both political and significant. Gloria Anzaldúa and bell hooks write about their experiences with various languages and dialects, describing the tension between using their home discourses and standard English. hooks describes her struggle with “learning to speak against black vernacular, against the ruptured and broken speech of a dispossessed and displaced people. Standard English is not the speech of exile. It is the language of conquest and domination” (hooks 168). She is most comfortable with communicating in the black vernacular, but it is a way of communicating that is not considered important to the dominant majority. Her home language is “the speech of exile” because it belongs to “a dispossessed and displaced

people.” Its marginal status is not valued in the dominant culture, and it is certainly not valued in the Common Core. Instead, standard English is the language that students must adopt in order to be successful. hooks provides the words of Adrienne Rich to help explain her experience: “*This is the oppressor’s language yet I need it to talk to you*” (as cited in hooks, 1994, p. 168). This statement aptly depicts the struggle of the colonized, as they are not only encouraged to adopt the oppressor’s language, but they need it in order to communicate in a variety of contexts. This constant use of the oppressor’s language may even serve as an instrument of trauma for the colonized, since it reinforces their marginalized status and history. hooks expands on her discussion of Rich’s words, saying it is not the English language itself that hurts her, but rather “what the oppressors do with it, how they shape it to become a territory that limits and defines, how they make it a weapon that can shame, humiliate, colonize” (as cited in hooks, 1994, p. 168).

Unfortunately, the Common Core has the authority and potential to shame, humiliate, and colonize students because of its privileging of one language over all others. Anzaldúa recalls a moment at school when she was punished for speaking Spanish at recess and another moment when she was “sent to the corner of the classroom for ‘talking back’ to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name” (Anzaldúa 75). These might be isolated moments of misunderstandings or poor practices, but I think Anzaldúa’s experience is probably indicative of the experience of many students in the country. While they may not be publicly humiliated for their language use, students are certainly in a classroom environment that actively seeks to erase difference from the classroom while promoting one way of communicating. Anzaldúa’s language use is tied so closely to her identity that she asserts: “So, if you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language” (Anzaldúa 81). Language, the root of

all literacies and discourses, has the power to promote certain means of communicating while rebuking others. Many individuals are deeply affected by this affirmation or negation of language; those who experience the negation of their language at the hands of the colonizer experience censoring, silencing, and suffering.

The relationship between the colonizer and the colonized is often filled with tension, and it can be described in terms of “*us*” versus “*them*” (Anzaldúa 25). These terms help define the boundaries of different cultures, with the “*us*” referring to the dominant majority and the “*them*” referring to minority groups. This differentiation is the crux of Othering, as it suggests there are inherent, fundamental differences between dominant and non-dominant groups. When we speak about colonization literally, as colonizers invading land, we can begin to see how the colonizers view themselves in relationship to the colonized. Colonizers “saw themselves at the center of the world; the colonized were at the margins. The colonizers saw themselves as the embodiment of what a human being should be, the proper ‘self’; native peoples were ‘other,’ different, and therefore inferior” (Tyson 366). The practice of Othering entails the colonizer passing judgment on people who are different and labeling them as inferior. In this way, the colonizers identify themselves (civilized) in opposition to the colonized (savage), which dehumanizes the colonized. When the colonizer encounters the Other, the colonizer has two choices. Whether the colonizer chooses to respond to the Other in terms of identity or in terms of difference, the outcome is always the same: the colonizer “would again tend to turn to the security of his own cultural perspective” (JanMohamed 65). In order for there to be true comprehension of Otherness and humanization of the Other, the colonizer would need to “somehow negate or at least severely bracket the values, assumptions, and ideology of his culture” (JanMohamed 65). Traditionally,

this sort of bracketing does not happen, and instead the colonizer's values and ideologies are imposed on the colonized.

The Common Core is one example of this practice of imposition. U.S. public school classrooms are sites of power for the colonizer to promote the Western agenda, and minority groups assimilate to the dominant culture through their formal schooling. The Common Core can be considered a tool that reinforces Othering because of what it promotes versus what it excludes. As evidenced by the inclusion of Western, hegemonic, patriarchal texts, and the exclusion of texts belonging to the Other, the CCSS writers have effectively Othered discourses of the colonized. The colonizer is typically not "inclined to expend any energy in understanding the worthless alterity of the colonized" (JanMohamed 65). This is why there is an absence of literacies and discourses valued by the colonized, by the Othered. By promoting and maintaining the discourse of the self, the colonist is able to "maintain his privileges by preserving the status quo" (JanMohamed 69). This practice effectively disenfranchises the Other, as the Other does not have the same degree of social, political, or economic privilege in the status quo. Ultimately, this paradigm leads to the same issues we have been experiencing in public education: students of low socioeconomic status and those who have minority-race status cannot compete equally with their more privileged counterparts. The Othering of non-dominant literacies and discourses in the Common Core might make this situation even worse.

Giroux discusses the traditional paradigm of education, in which "the school curriculum (canon) is defended as being representative of a version of Western history that is self-righteously equated with civilization itself" ("Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference" 7). Even though he is not discussing public schools in the Common Core era, Giroux's observation about school curriculum accurately reflects the discourse being promoted in the

Common Core. The centering of Western canon, history, and discourse effectively decenters all else. When Western history is “equated with civilization itself,” all other histories and ways of knowing are devalued and Othered. This continued practice has the potential to marginalize and alienate students whose home discourses do not match that of the school curriculum. This practice also reaffirms “what blacks, women, and other subordinate groups generally accept as a given: it is only the voices of white males that count” (“Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference” 7). Although curricula are beginning to incorporate more diverse authors and texts, the vast majority of suggested authors and texts in the Common Core documents are Western, white males. Furthermore, the discourse in which students are operating, which privileges logocentric, monolithic ways of communicating, is also a construction of Western males.

However, it is possible to challenge the dominant colonizer through critical inquiry and through the application of postcolonial theory. By using a postcolonial lens to examine power dynamics between the colonizer and the colonized, we may be able to examine “the complex ways in which difference and marginality are produced in particular contexts rather than being inherent by virtue of category” (Bahri 77). Conceptualized in this way, difference is not “inherent by virtue of category” but is produced by groups of people who exist in particular contexts and contact zones. As a centerpiece of critical pedagogy, difference can help to transform classrooms from spaces that exclude, marginalize, and Other to spaces to include, validate, and humanize.

CHALLENGING HEGEMONIC DISCOURSE THREATENS THOSE IN POWER

It is difficult to challenge hegemonic discourse, however, because those in power feel threatened by the decentering of their discourse. It is seen as threatening to “the integrative character of the American polity” and “disrespectful of the ‘high culture’ of the West”

(“Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference” 5). Those who want to “rewrite the cultural, political, and social codes of the dominant society” are challenged by “the neoconservative view of national unity and security” (“Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference” 5). The majority may think that the decentering of their ideology threatens national unity, but it really only threatens their dominance and control of the colonized and of the Other.

bell hooks reinforces this idea by discussing two incidents from her past and the revelation of fear these incidents produced. She indicates: “these seemingly trivial incidents reveal how deep-seated is the fear that any de-centering of Western civilizations, of the white male canon, is really an act of cultural genocide” (hooks 32). The greatest irony here is that the Common Core, by reinforcing the existing canon, commits cultural genocide of non-dominant literacies and discourses every day. Student populations who are most affected by the preservation of the Western, white male canon at the expense of non-dominant discourses are primarily minority and marginalized groups. They are particularly vulnerable because their indoctrination into dominant discourses and literacies will most likely cause them to lose parts of their own traditions, identities, and ways of being in the world.

Although hooks’s personal experience might not be seen by readers as scholarly material, her experiences are useful in that they might be representative of African Americans’ experiences during the desegregation of schools in the 1960s. hooks describes her experience being bussed to white schools as jarring because now “knowledge was suddenly about information only. It had no relation to how one lived, behaved” (hooks 3). Perhaps most importantly, “it was no longer connected to antiracist struggle” (hooks 3). Although this thesis does not focus on U.S. public schooling during the 1960s, I find that hooks’s observations regarding her experience may apply to some students’ experiences today. The fact that learning

in school for hooks was disconnected from antiracist struggle suggests to me that her school was not a site that valued difference and resistance. Instead, her school became a site separate from “real life” because her experiences, knowledge, and identity were no longer valued in the classroom. I think this same phenomenon has the potential to manifest for students today who feel that their knowledge, expertise, and identities are undervalued. Ultimately, hooks felt that her integrated school expected obedience from its students, instead of a strong will to learn (hooks 3). This sense of eagerness, she asserts “could easily be seen as a threat to white authority” (hooks 3). Although schools have changed drastically since the 1960s, whites largely continue to dominate school standards, instruction, and assessment. Such a paradigm is particularly problematic for students who want to challenge those in power, since the paradigm itself leaves little room for resistance against the dominant majority.

Perhaps one of the most threatening acts to the hegemony would be to follow Anzaldúa’s advice and “stop importing Greek myths and the Western Cartesian split point of view” and instead “root ourselves in the mythological soil and soul of this continent” (Anzaldúa 90). This would be threatening because replacing the existing European canon with a new one, potentially filled with works that are perceived to de-center Western authority, could destabilize the power of the dominant majority. The Common Core does uphold the existing European canon to a great extent, as it transplants Greek mythology and Shakespeare into U.S. instruction. One might argue that Anzaldúa’s call is partially supported by the Common Core with the inclusion of several U.S. authors and works. However, I would argue that the emphasis on U.S. historical documents and literary works still upholds a Western, white, male canon, as shown in the rhetorical analysis chapters. Anzaldúa, in desiring us to root ourselves in this continent, probably wishes for works

that are truly representative of the lives and experiences of people in the U.S. – works that are truly multicultural and value difference.

Anzaldúa encourages divergent thinking, which is “characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes” (Anzaldúa 101). She discourages convergent thinking, which can be described as “analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode)” (Anzaldúa 101). Divergent thinking promotes inclusivity and encourages critical thinking because it takes into account a broader perspective. This kind of thinking, as well as the critical engagement that accompanies it, is threatening to those who wish to uphold the existing, dominant paradigm. Divergent thinking allows for the questioning and challenging of oppressive power structures, which the dominant majority would want to maintain and perpetuate. Therefore, divergent thinking could be considered threatening to dominant groups in power, while convergent thinking could be seen as a safe, reliable method for maintaining power structures of the status quo. Allowing students to engage in divergent thinking would allow them to resist and challenge hegemonic discourses and the dominant canon.

USING LITERACY TO CHALLENGE THE HEGEMONY

Even though current dominant literacy practices in public schools have the potential to Other non-dominant discourses and alienate students, literacy can also be used to challenge oppressive hegemonic systems. This is perhaps one of the most liberating aspects of literacy, as it can be used as a form of resistance to bring about necessary change. One example of such resistance is in Spivak’s work. Hall and Rosner state that although most “academic readers are accustomed to the Aristotelian format – state your case and prove it – Spivak seems to work laterally, moving from case to case, point to point, rarely offering examples” (Hall and Rosner

118). Spivak's structure challenges the privileging of Aristotelian rhetoric (and by extension, the Western colonizer's structure) by employing a different organization. This is particularly noteworthy, given that Spivak's standing as an academic presupposes that she will write in a linear Western structure. In subverting this hegemonic structure, Spivak is also introducing a new viable structure that could replace or exist alongside current dominant ones.

Changes to the hegemonic canon, the same canon that is emphasized in schools, is slowly occurring. For example, textbooks used in high school and college classrooms have traditionally been "confined largely to the work of white male writers" which maintains "white cultural hegemony" (Tyson 382). Works by writers of other populations are mostly underrepresented, but inclusion of these works is happening slowly. This is a promising sign, as the inclusion of these writers and works will deemphasize the importance of the Western, white male canon. However, it is important pedagogically to remember that writers belonging to traditionally underrepresented groups should not be reduced to "tokens" and should not be seen as being representative of entire groups of people. These changes to the canon ultimately help to diversify the writings that are emphasized and privileged in schools, which can greatly increase student engagement and academic success.

These methods of challenging hegemonic discourse can be applied to literacy practices in the classroom. Critical pedagogy is particularly effective here, as it values difference, resistance, and critical examination of institutional power structures. Literacy itself "becomes critical to the degree that it makes problematic the transcendent and universalizing claim of the unifying authoritative voice of Eurocentric tradition" ("Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference" 2). When literacy is viewed and employed in this way, it can be used to challenge the authority of the Eurocentric tradition. In doing so, the authority and credibility of other

traditions have a higher probability of being valued. One specific way this is accomplished is through the act of resisting language practices.

bell hooks describes the African American experience, from her perspective, and how this group is effectively able to subvert the colonizer's language: "By transforming the oppressor's language, making a culture of resistance, black people created an intimate speech that could say far more than was permissible within the boundaries of standard English" (hooks 171). She indicates that the power of this speech not only "enables resistance to white supremacy," but it also "forges a space for alternative cultural production and alternative epistemologies" (hooks 171). This passage is particularly salient because of its direct reference to standard English and explains why certain groups find it useful to intentionally resist this dialect. Mastery of standard English, as previously stated, is required to demonstrate proficiency with the Common Core's language strand. However, such mastery is another form of colonization for students who do not fit into the dominant, white population. Perhaps the most striking part of this passage is the act that occurs alongside resistance – the forging of "a space for alternative cultural production and alternative epistemologies." Just as Spivak's non-Aristotelian structure provides an alternative to the dominant, Western rhetorical structure, transforming standard English to other forms provides alternatives to the colonizer's language. This type of resistance can be powerful for students in classroom settings who already feel alienated and want their home discourses and literacies to be valued and validated.

In addition to valuing students' personal experiences and expertise as ways of knowing, critical pedagogy invites students to "make judgments about how society is historically and socially constructed, how existing social practices are implicated in relations of equality and justice, and how such practices structure inequalities around racism, sexism, and other forms of

oppression” (“Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference” 8). This critical examination is not encouraged or supported by the Common Core. The English Language Arts Standards require that students analyze texts themselves, but students are not required to analyze the power structures surrounding the texts – the power structures that support the writing and distribution of certain material while devaluing or censoring others. The agents who determine what material is taught and perpetuated are part of dominant groups that have the capacity to marginalize and Other non-dominant groups and their work. Critical evaluation of these institutional systems is not mentioned in the Common Core whatsoever, as the analysis and evaluation students engage in is limited to non-fiction and literary texts. As mentioned in the previous section, this type of critical inquiry might be viewed as threatening to those in power. Therefore, in order to maintain the status quo, dominant groups continue to exert their power while restricting how others engage in a critique of this power. Although critical pedagogy is not supported or encouraged in the Common Core, educators may still enact it. An example of this kind of inquiry, even though it may not have been termed critical pedagogy, has been used in hooks’s teaching experience. She is not discussing teaching in the Common Core era, but her comments are still useful for thinking about how critical inquiry can be effectively incorporated into public school classrooms. By teaching beyond boundaries, hooks has been able to “imagine and enact pedagogical practices that engage directly both the concern for interrogating biases in curricula that reinscribe systems of domination (such as racism and sexism) while simultaneously providing new ways to teach diverse groups of students” (hooks 10). In our society, it is becoming increasingly important for educators to know how to engage with many different populations of students.

In Delpit’s chapter “The Politics of Teaching Literate Discourse” the author discusses Gee’s position on literacy in schools. She finds problematic his contention that “people who have

not been born into dominant discourses will find it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to acquire such a discourse” (Delpit 546). As Gee’s argument goes, this difficulty reduces students’ chances at obtaining social capital in their adult lives. Delpit disagrees with this position, indicating that many students can acquire the dominant discourse in the classroom and use it to gain social capital (Delpit 546). The larger question may be: is the purpose of education to provide students with critical apparatuses so that they may analyze the contexts in which they participate?

Although teaching students the dominant discourse might increase their access to social, political, and economic opportunities and capital, are students’ primary discourses being devalued and are students essentially being colonized? Delpit acknowledges this concern, but she argues that individuals who have acquired the dominant discourse “have the ability to transform dominant discourses for liberatory purposes” (Delpit 552). Instead of focusing on resisting hegemonic discourse, Delpit supports the idea of mastering the dominant discourse in order to change it. One could argue that the only way to change hegemonic discourses and literacy practices is by mastering them first, but students might not understand the connection between mastering an oppressive, colonizing discourse and then later challenging it. We need to be aware that the privileging of certain literacies and discourses in public school classrooms can greatly impact students’ self-perceptions, students’ perceptions of the dominant culture, and students’ abilities to engage in dominant discourses when they enter society (which affects their chances of obtaining capital).

Along these lines, Olson describes an on-going debate among college composition instructors as to whether their role “is to replace students’ home discourse with ‘official’ academic discourse or to empower students to move in and out of multiple discourses with

facility” (Olson 91). This is not simply a pedagogical question, but an ethical question, as well. Unfortunately, there is no right answer to this question. All possible answers are contingent upon one’s political ideology, which is why the debate continues to exist. If students do not assimilate and function within the dominant discourse, due to lack of access or materials, they are at risk for being judged. They might be judged as being unintelligent, being unable to learn, or being inferior people. Anzaldúa states an example of this: “If a person, Chicana or Latina, has a low estimation of my native tongue, she also has a low estimation of me” (Anzaldúa 80). In this case, Anzaldúa is placed in an inferior position because of her language use. While the Common Core does not explicitly state that one form of English is privileged over another, it is clear that the standards want all students to achieve proficiency in standard English, while proficiency in no other dialect is required (or even mentioned). This requirement indirectly illustrates that the designers of the Common Core do have a low estimation of languages and dialects other than standard English, which unfortunately devalues some students’ native ways of communicating.

It could be argued that assimilating to the dominant culture and using dominant language practices are useful for minority-race populations so they are not judged poorly. However, I would argue that challenging the attitudes surrounding literacy and discourses are truly the matters that need changing. Additionally, this act of replacing one’s home literacy practices with new practices that are socially accepted by the dominant culture is a severe form of colonization.

STUDENT AGENCY

In order for students to have a high degree of agency in their learning and in their lives, pedagogical practices need to “erode rather than accommodate dominant disciplinary structures and discourses” and “offer students the knowledge, skills, and values they will need to negotiate and transform the world in which they find themselves” (“Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of

Difference” 9). Giving students opportunities to challenge dominant discourses, as well as providing them with access to tools and resources, can help them affect meaningful change. Literacy is quite powerful in this process, as it provides students “a form of social criticism for engaging” conditions that are necessary for them to “learn the knowledge and skills essential for self-reflection and collective agency” (“Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference” 1). The types of literacies that are privileged in the Common Core can be used to increase student agency, and teachers have ample opportunities to accomplish this. In empowering students to engage in literacies that will benefit them, students can be better prepared economically, socially, and politically after graduation. As I mentioned in the chapter on literacy scholarship, social goods are negotiated through language use. Necessarily, then, student participation in certain literacy practices and discourses can help students obtain social, economic, and political capital after graduation. Some of the literacies privileged in the Common Core, such as digital literacy, can serve this function. However, there is the risk that perpetuating dominant discourses at the expense of students’ home discourses, knowledge, and expertise will further marginalize already vulnerable populations of students.

In postcolonial theory, the term “subaltern” has evolved in meaning and remains a disputed concept. I will use Gayatri Spivak’s use of the term, as her definition most closely aligns with this discussion. Her definition characterizes the subaltern as an individual who exists outside of hegemonic power structures and who has limited or no access to cultural imperialism. Spivak’s definition varies from Gramsci’s earlier conceptualization of the term, as it takes into account the struggle of women and failure of trying to economically mobilize the colonized in India. According to Spivak, the subaltern is not simply someone who is oppressed or Othered; rather, the subaltern is someone who exists beyond the boundaries of hegemonic power

structures. Because of this absence of autonomy, Spivak asserts that the subaltern cannot speak (Spivak 309). In the context of her article, she is speaking about subjects in India who are subjected to cultural or economic colonialism and she is not discussing U.S. public school students. However, her term might be applied to students in the U.S. public education system for two reasons.

First, students are incredibly vulnerable in the public education system and have no power in the political process until they become adults. Their agency in political or governmental processes is limited due to their age and levels of development. Second, this project has explored several agents involved in the creation and implementation of the standards. These agents promote the Common Core because of its perceived economic value, not because the standards have students' best interests in mind. Students exist in the Common Core era as a means to an end – as future workers who will sustain our nation's economy. For these two reasons, students have very little autonomy in their educational careers and certainly exist outside of the power structures that determine what they are required to learn.

If we consider students to be subalterns of the U.S. public education system, then, Spivak would argue that students have no voice. Spivak would indicate that despite “well-intentioned efforts to give voice to the subaltern, there is little possibility for recovering the subaltern voice, in that hegemonic discourse constitutes and disarticulates the subaltern” (as cited in Olson, 2004, p. 89). It is through the colonizing practice of classroom instruction, Spivak argues, that “the oppressed subject, through a process of internalizing the discourse of the master, learns to construct his or her identity *as Other*, to rewrite the self as the object of imperialism” (as cited in Olson, 2004, p. 89). Spivak's conclusion is that subalterns cannot be spoken for but only *to* “in an *imagined* conversation across class lines and historical distances” (as cited in Lu, 2004, p. 27).

One of the implications here is that students have no voice or autonomy in establishing standards for themselves because those decisions have been made for them by outside agents. Another implication is that students are alienated by classroom instruction and construct identities as *Other* than what is dominant, mainstream, and oppressive. These acts of identity construction will inevitably shape students as they develop into young adults. The notion that subalterns cannot be spoken for is problematic, as the Common Core indicates students should “understand other perspectives and cultures” (“Students Who are College and Career Ready in Reading, Writing, Speaking, Listening, & Language”). However, the utilization of a multicultural curriculum taught primarily by white teachers, within the colonizing framework of the Common Core, is patronizing at best and damaging at worst.

However, Homi Bhabha disagrees with Spivak and believes that the subaltern can speak. His notion of the subaltern is similar to Spivak’s in that the subaltern cannot escape hegemonic power structures and discourse, but he argues the subaltern is able to speak “from within it, turning it on itself. And in this very act of resistance, colonial power is diminished, altered, and thus ambivalent, limited, never complete, never entirely successful” (as cited in Olson, 2004, p. 90). This attitude toward the subaltern’s autonomy is more promising, as it suggests that the subaltern can resist oppressive hegemonic structures by challenging them from within the structures themselves. An example might be African American students who learn standard English (because it is required) but modify it in certain contexts in order to transform the oppressor’s language. If students could be considered subalterns that do, in fact, have a voice, then students would have a greater degree of autonomy and agency in their own learning. This sense of agency would greatly benefit from access to resources and platforms used to critique and respond to the dominant discourse. Another possibility to increase student agency of

oppressed students lies in bell hooks's work. She indicates that she "celebrate[s] teaching that enables transgressions – a movement against and beyond boundaries" (hooks 12). Transgressions allow spaces of hegemonic subversion to develop, challenging the existing canon.

It is essential ethically for minority students to have their primary literacies be validated, which is one way of resisting the oppressive nature of the Common Core. However, as Freire points out, one of the greatest challenges to achieving liberation "is that oppressive reality absorbs those within it and thereby acts to submerge human beings' consciousness" (Freire 51). This begs the questions: Are students within a Common Core curriculum provided the tools to fight the oppressor? Are they aware of institutional structures that perpetuate oppressive practices in public education? This is perhaps why critical pedagogy would be particularly useful in the Common Core era, as awareness of these structures is the first step in affecting meaningful change. Large-scale resistance and change would require a massive paradigm shift in public education, as well as changes in cultural beliefs and attitudes.

A REIMAGINED PARADIGM

Despite the colonizing potential of the Common Core, educators still have opportunities to engage students in activities that question and challenge the dominant discourse perpetuated by the Standards and the literary canon. Giroux indicates that critical literacy is particularly valuable for this work because it

signals the need to challenge and redefine the substance and effects of cultural borders, the need to create opportunities for teachers and students to be border crossers in order to understand otherness on its own terms, and the need to create borderlands in which diverse cultural resources allow for the fashioning of new identities within existing configurations of power. ("Literacy, Pedagogy, and the Politics of Difference" 4)

The Common Core does not particularly encourage teachers and students to be border crossers, to understand otherness, or to critically assess difference. Instead, the Common Core attempts to

shape students into the same product – a product that will work efficiently and contribute positively to the economy. While these are not negative characteristics, the Common Core does not address other issues that are equally important: student identity, critical engagement with others in contact zones, and analysis of political and institutional structures that perpetuate inequality. While educators can still find ways to address these important issues, it seems that a new paradigm that places these issues at the center of classroom inquiry would benefit students in ways not currently emphasized in the Common Core.

Several authors have discussed the need for a new paradigm and what it might entail. bell hooks asserts that “there is not nearly enough practical discussion of ways classroom settings can be transformed so that the learning experience is inclusive” (hooks 35). Inclusivity is essential and can be incorporated in a variety of ways – by expanding the canon we use in English Language Arts classes, by emphasizing non-dominant literacies and discourses, and by increasing student engagement with class material. Approaching classroom instruction in this way may help students understand power dynamics in new ways. Another way the barriers between those in dominant and non-dominant positions may be broken down, Freire suggests, is through specific pedagogical methods “in which those who help and those who are being helped help each other simultaneously” (as cited in hooks, 1994, p. 54). With this interaction, the helper does not dominate the helped, and the relationship between peers is much more equal (Freire qtd. in hooks 54). In this kind of a framework, students are not perpetuating dominant and non-dominant roles typical of the colonialist tradition. Ideally, a public school classroom would be a space that values difference, equality, and otherness. Along these lines, Anzaldúa hopes for a genuine mestizo, a combination of elements in which none are dominant:

I would hope for [a child] to have a peaceful community in all the different worlds, in all the different cultures, in all the different realities. I would hope for [this child] to be a true mestizo, and I don't think it's possible right now because the powers that decide the laws of man are very much monolithic. It's not an equal kind of thing. (Anzaldúa qtd. in Lunsford 66)

Anzaldúa captures my concern with the current paradigm and instead offers her own, one that would promote equality in a world of difference. Perpetuating hegemonic discourses keeps the majority in a safe, privileged position. Subversion of this position would cause the dominant majority instability, loss of privilege, loss of power, and loss of capital. Freire calls for a paradigm shift in which the oppressed participate in the construction of their own pedagogy (Freire 54). He insists that “the oppressed must be their own example in the struggle of their redemption” (Freire 54). In theory, I agree that the oppressed should engage in the development of their own pedagogy, but practically implementing this would be quite difficult given the current paradigm in public education. Freire's suggested paradigm shift (if it were possible) comes with its own challenges. Power of any kind, associated with any kind of discourse, necessarily entails oppression of certain groups. As Foucault indicates: “If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse” (Foucault 61). According to this argument, any power structure in public education, no matter the paradigm, will necessarily oppress certain peoples. This would happen because certain discourses would always be privileged, while others would actively be Othered. The implication then is that perhaps any paradigm in public education would have the potential to Other discourses and alienate students.

One might argue that a new paradigm is not necessary, since any paradigm has the potential to Other. However, true change might only occur in a new educational framework, as Audre Lorde succinctly states: “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde 123). According to this philosophy, tools of the dominant hegemony will never be able to bring about a new paradigm. This work can only be accomplished in creating new tools that can challenge and disrupt the existing, hegemonic power structures.

The Common Core privileges literacies that are traditionally Western, hegemonic, and patriarchal while reinforcing values that are white and middle-class. For this reason, the Common Core is not really a radical reform measure in public education, but it rather upholds the existing status quo. In upholding the status quo, the Standards effectively Other literacies and discourses that are not perceived to be part of the dominant culture and are therefore not gateways to political, social, and economic capital for non-dominant and race-minority students.

FUTURE RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

CLOSING COMMENTS ON THE COMMON CORE

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the Common Core is the motivations driving its creation and implementation. These motives exist beyond the attitude that public education is intended to serve the best interests of our students and that a well-educated public is essential to the nation's general well being. Instead, the implicit motives behind the Common Core are problematic, as they do not exist with the best interests of all students in mind. The privileged discourse perpetuated by the Common Core risks alienating students rather than validating their ways of being and ways of knowing. Additionally, the standards are aligned with textbooks and tests, increasing profit substantially for the companies who are contracted to create the textbooks and manage standardized tests. Because of the extent of corporate involvement in the Common Core, the testing culture is only reinforced. As Christopher Tienken suitably asks: "Can one assessment, given on a spring day in April, really provide a smart and balanced perspective of academic achievement in all its forms?" (Tienken 309). As more difficult standardized tests are introduced in conjunction with the Common Core, this question will become increasingly more important. Both of the aforementioned implicit motives warrant further consideration and discussion as the Common Core continues to unfold nearly nationwide.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

If I had the opportunity to conduct additional research related to this topic, there are several viable topics related to the Common Core and the landscape of public education in general. First, I might examine the PARCC examinations for reading and writing and note which literacies and literacy practices are emphasized in the tests. Colorado is a PARCC state, and full

implementation of the Common Core is currently underway during the 2013-2014 school year. Colorado is a state, among many others, that is implicated in this thesis's critique of the Common Core. The states that have adopted the Common Core are helping to maintain, whether intentionally or unintentionally, the motives behind the standards. Therefore, Colorado is implicated in any effects that manifest due to the implementation of the Common Core. Second, I might critically analyze the Council of Writing Program Administrators (CWPA) Position Statement on Pre-College Credit for Writing, which was approved by the CWPA Executive Board in July 2013 ("CWPA Statement on Pre-College Credit Now LIVE"). This document was created to compare "the three main alternatives high school students have for completing early the required first-year writing (FYW) course they would otherwise take after matriculating at college. These alternatives are Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB), and dual credit or concurrent enrollment (DC/CE)" ("CWPA Position Statement on Pre-College Credit for Writing"). The creation of this document may be connected to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, as new standards introduced to public schools can affect how institutions of higher education manage their course offerings and distribution of credits. Third, I could analyze the findings of NCTE's Listening Tour, which is intended "to build a portrait of the experiences and expectations of incoming college composition students" ("Listening Tour"). This is accomplished by having incoming college students complete a survey regarding their past writing experiences. The Listening Tour was launched in the fall of 2013, perhaps in response to the wide scale adoption of the Common Core.

The most significant impact of the Common Core is the effect the standards will have on students. The literacies, literacy practices, and discourses privileged in the standards threaten to alienate students belonging to marginalized populations. However, there is space in educators'

pedagogical approaches that can assist students in increasing their senses of agency, shaping their identities in positive ways, and resisting colonization perpetuated by the dominant majority. Although the current paradigm of public schooling is overshadowed by capitalist interests and the potential to colonize students, change is possible through the critical examination of the motives behind the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Widespread awareness of these motives and the continuation of productive conversation may lead to positive changes in the literacies, literacy practices, and discourses privileged in today's public schools.

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