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Teaching and Learning in an "Audit Culture��: A Critical Genre Analysis of Common Core Implementation
by Brad Jacobson

This article examines classroom materials and sample assessments to understand the effects of Common Core implementation on the teaching and learning of writing. Drawing on theories of genre systems and intertextuality, the article focuses on the ways in which a Common Core-aligned senior English Language Arts textbook and sample writing assessment recontextualize the standards in writing prompts, criteria, and written instructions related to argumentative writing. This critical genre analysis demonstrates the ways in which a theory of writing is transformed in the implementation of the standards, and makes visible the ways in which the implementation process privileges the goals and needs of an accountability mandate rather than the teachers and students enacting the standards.

Reflecting on his first reading of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), McComiskey (2012) noted his surprise that he "*didn't* hate" the writing standards (p. 537). He pointed out that some of the central requirements—such as backing up claims with specific evidence and developing a style appropriate to purpose, audience, and task—would be appropriate in any college writing class. Because of this "forward-looking focus on college and career readiness," he suggested, the CCSS may actually serve as a useful bridge to college writing. He continued, "The CCSS…is not itself to be feared; the assessment instruments written by publishing companies as a means to sell textbooks are greatly to be feared" (p. 539). The standards themselves, in other words, might be productive or at the very least not harmful, but the implementation of those standards should be closely monitored.

In this article, I seek to respond to this concern by examining the potential impact of Common Core implementation on classroom practice and student learning. As McComiskey's (2012) fears of assessment imply, the central focus on testing and accountability related to the adoption of these standards creates the need for an ecosystem of related texts that bring the standards into practice. These "genres of implementation," including textbooks and assessment instruments, are institutional texts that work together to organize the activity of teachers and students. A critical genre perspective allows us to see how the implementation of the Common Core writing standards influences classroom practice. I will first introduce the concept of genre systems as a framework for understanding education reform as a social, textually mediated process. Then, I examine the CCSS as a social practice, identifying some of the social and political structures that help to make sense of the text. The central analysis focuses on the ways in which a Common Core-aligned Senior English textbook and a sample writing assessment recontextualize the theory of writing advocated in the standards as they are translated into classroom practice. By exploring the contradictions and simplifications of a theory of writing as it moves from policy to practice, the article offers insight into the ongoing struggle to define writing and how it should be taught in schools.

Education Reform through a Genre System Lens

In their landmark history of school reform, Tyack and Cuban (1995) offered a useful framework for understanding education reform as a social, discursive process. They described reform efforts in broad stages from *policy talk* about problems and potential solutions, to *policy action* and adoption of reforms, and finally actual *implementation* of these planned changes in the schools (see Figure 1). Education policy talk, they explained, happens "all the time" and "in many contexts" among not only the policy elites, but also among parents and children at the dinner table, PTA members at a meeting, school board members, teachers, and other stakeholders in many different situations (p. 42). Policy talk, in other words, happens within and across interrelated networks of people and texts. Eventually this talk may be taken up as policy action, such as the creation and adoption of the CCSS. The final stage is implementation, in which the reform is put into action in schools. Tyack and Cuban suggested that implementation "takes time and moves in mysterious ways" (p. 54), making it difficult to measure the relationship between policy talk and institutional trends. This article offers a genre system framework to help understand the often-mysterious process. As Figure 1 demonstrates, texts mediate the implementation of education reform. A genre system framework helps clarify the ways in which these different genres speak to, from, and with each other as the reform is implemented.
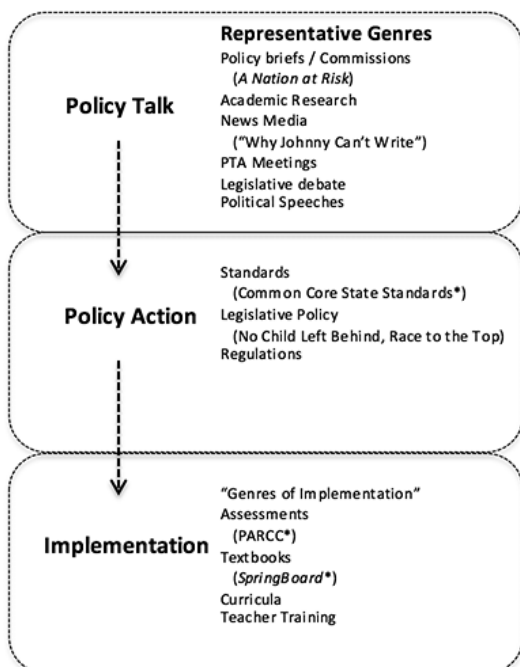
Figure 1. Education reform as a genre system based on the Tyack and Cuban (1995) model. Texts marked with an asterisk (*) are analyzed in this article.

A social and historical view of genre is instructive for understanding how writing tends to stabilize institutions and institutional practices. Drawing from Bakhtin's (1986) theory of speech genres that emphasized intertextuality, scholars have argued that generic texts are responses to prior texts and create opportunities for others to respond. Bazerman's (1994) research on the patent process, for example, explored the ways genres rely upon each other to achieve a social purpose. Much like the related texts that facilitate education reform, he pointed out that a single patent requires cartons of documents, as each patent letter leads to a variety of different potential textual responses. In a "genre system," he explained, different genres work with each other toward social action (p. 97).

Russell (1997) elaborated upon this notion of genre systems to develop a method for analyzing how macro-level forces like social and political structures affect micro-level actions and actors. He constructed an ecological, networked approach that allows researchers to view genres as tools that help individual actors and communities achieve their goals. By examining genres within their systems of activity, Russell argued that genres serve to maintain and reproduce boundaries between social structures as well as the identities of users within those structures (p. 521). To use an example that pertains to this article, writing textbooks tend to construct a certain kind of reader, and students acclimated to this genre adapt a passive reading approach that allows for success within that social structure. Since genres help to maintain social structures and influence identities, Russell (1997) argued that power is also analyzable through genres. He claimed that to "understand power in modern social practices, one must follow the genres, written and otherwise. Power appears in specific, locatable occasions of mediated action and is created in the network of many localized instances" (p. 524). Identifying these local instances, and identifying which actors are granted authority to construct these texts or discourses, can demonstrate how or when certain groups or actors have greater or lesser influence.

Berkenkotter (2001) similarly suggested that genres mediate institutional practice and localized action, and in the process set expectations for what individual actors can or cannot do. Berkenkotter argued for a genre system approach to identify the multivoicedness and potential contradictions or dissonances in an institutional situation. Studying the ways in which institutional genres recontextualize prior texts and discourses can offer a way of understanding the relationships between macro-level forces and micro-level practices. In other words, studying the relationships of genres can help us see how and why people do things in particular situations.

These connections between genre systems, power, and institutional organization offer a framework for applying Tyack and Cuban's (1994) model of the education reform process to Common Core implementation. The analysis that follows explores the intertextual relationships between policy talk, policy action, and the genres of implementation, allowing us to see the potential contradictions within and between the texts that construct a theory of writing and operationalize it in classroom practice. The primary analysis centers on *SpringBoard*, a Common Core-aligned textbook and "program" for Senior English. Since textbooks are institutional genres that mediate classroom instruction and learning, they are situated in a unique rhetorical position as teachers and administrators try to navigate a new system of standards and assessments. The article also examines sample prompts and scoring rubrics from the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment, which was administered to over five million students in eleven states and Washington, D.C. in the spring of 2015 (PARCC, 2015b). By analyzing the system of genres that bring this standards-based education reform into practice, we will see the ways power is exercised in defining writing

and how it should be taught in the age of Common Core.

Common Core as Text

The adoption and implementation of the CCSS reflects a decades-long effort by policymakers to "raise standards" in response to perceived crises in education. The current national focus on standards is often traced to the 1970s and 1980s, when the publication of "Why Johnny Can't Write" in *Newsweek* and the National Commission on Excellence in Education's *A Nation At Risk* helped to build a national distrust for public education after the optimism of the 1960s. These calls for education reform spoke to a nation perceived to be in crisis, a rhetorical stance fueled by lagging international test scores and cultural and demographic shifts in public schools.[1]

It has been over thirty years since *A Nation at Risk*, and calls for raising standards as a way to "fix" education show no signs of abating. In fact, educational standards have become part of what Tyack and Tobin (1994) called the "grammar" of schooling, or the unconscious understanding of what a school is and does. The near-universal acceptance of "raising standards" as central to school reform is the product of unique cultural forces. Apple (2004) has attributed this changing common sense to a unique confluence of ideologies into what he calls "conservative modernisation" (p.11). In his telling, the "complicated alliance" driving the last thirty years of education reform has centered around the seemingly competing meta-discourses of marketization and centralization, creating a unique atmosphere in which business models and an ideology of individual accountability come together to make continued educational evaluation a matter of common sense. This "audit culture" necessitates the constant production of evidence (in this case, test scores) to show that students and teachers are doing things efficiently and in the "correct" way (Apple, 2004, p. 14). Instead of formative assessments ideally geared toward in-process learning and improvement, the logic of the audit culture calls for a system of formalized, summative assessments from which all actors in education, and the education system as a whole, can be labeled successful or failing based on test results.

An understanding of intertextuality can help us to see how this cultural logic influences the creation and reception of the Common Core writing standards. Bakhtin (1986) suggested all texts respond in some way to a prior text and retain traces of that text. Therefore, all utterances are filled with "dialogic overtones" that must be taken into account for full understanding (p. 92). For Fairclough (1992), identifying the ways in which people achieve comprehension is an important part of understanding the intertextuality of a text. The text sets up an opportunity for the reader to interpret it, often through assumptions, ideological or otherwise (pp. 83-84). Through this lens, the Common Core State Standards are multi-layered and the product of many voices across time and space, and are only comprehensible when considered in response to ongoing discussion of education reform of the last century. For example, the opening sentence of the English Language Arts Standards explains that the standards will "fulfill the charge issued by the states…to ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school" (National Governors Association [NGA], 2010a, p. 3). This statement only gains meaning in response to the ongoing discourse of crisis in education. The Common Core writers seem to speak back to an unnamed text in which students are not appropriately literate at the end of high school, and rely upon the reader to make that connection. They also rely on the discourses of raising standards, accountability for schools and teachers, and public education as career preparation, all contested stances concretized uncritically in the text.

The common sense understanding of standards in the audit culture requires testing in order to gauge how well the goals are met and to provide some sense of "accountability." Standards in education thus have their own set of generic expectations: they are meant to name student learning goals or outcomes and to define those goals in a way that allows them to be measured. Importantly, standards or outcomes statements are only intended to define what students should learn, but not how teachers or school leaders should get them there. As the CCSS writers (NGA, 2010a) explained, the standards focus on results, not the means of getting there, and it is up to "teachers, curriculum developers, and states to determine how those goals should be reached" (p. 4). Thus, the writing standards are purported to describe what "good writing" looks like for students in grades K-12, but not a specific method for teaching.

Common Core and a Theory of Writing

Since the standards identify the intended outcomes of instruction, they also must identify the kinds of writing that should be evaluated. In this case, the Common Core Anchor Standards for Writing (NGA, 2010a) include a list of three "text types and purposes" that name the types of writing valued: arguments, informative/explanatory texts, and narratives. In the analysis that follows, I will focus primarily on arguments because the writers (NGA, 2010b) deem argumentative writing to be "critical to college and career readiness" (p. 24). The purpose here is not to evaluate the argumentative writing standards, but rather to describe the standards in a way that makes visible the conflicted underlying theory of writing that informs the implementation process.[2]

Figure 2. CCSS grades eleven and twelve grade-specific standards for argumentative writing (NGA, 2010a, p. 45).

According to the anchor standards (NGA, 2010a), a student should be able to "write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence" (p. 41). Grade-specific standards then break this anchor standard into more precise learning outcomes (see Figure 2). In an explanatory paragraph printed on the same page as the anchor standards, the writers call for what compositionists might recognize as a rhetorical approach to writing, including "careful consideration" of task, purpose, and audience, and the need to know how to combine "elements of different kinds of writing…to produce complex and nuanced writing" (p. 41). The writers of the standards include "audience" in both an anchor standard and in a grade-specific standard: Students should "[p]roduce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience" (p. 41), and should develop claims and counterclaims "in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases" (p. 45). These two statements could lead one to read a relatively complex, rhetorically situated theory of writing in which decisions about content, genre, and style are truly dependent upon context. However, one can also read the multivoicedness of the text as the rhetorical, context-based understanding of argumentative writing interacts with the more formalist standards emphasizing general writing skills like "formal style" and "objective tone."

As Hillocks (2002) suggested in his study of state writing assessments under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the only way to really understand the theory of writing espoused by the standards is to examine how they are taken up in practice. In the next section, I examine the ways the standards for argumentative writing are transformed in a textbook and sample assessment intended for use in the 2014-2015 school year. We will see tension between the conflicting theories emerge as the standards are recontextualized in classroom practice.

The Genres of Implementation

As Tyack and Cuban (1995) suggested, the school reform process relies upon a network of interrelated texts to bring education policy from talk into classrooms. Since the Common Core State Standards only offer an end goal or outcome for student learning, the genres of implementation (such as textbooks and assessments) are the genres that translate the standards into practice. These genres organize the activity of schools and classrooms, influencing the work of students and teachers.

The current implementation of the Common Core differs in important ways from more recent standards-based reform initiatives. Whereas the implementation of No Child Left Behind required each state to create its own standards and assessments, the CCSS offers the same standards to all states that adopt it. This centralization streamlines the efforts of education publishers. In the NCLB era, textbook publishers had to adapt to meet each state's individual needs and standards, but the adoption of CCSS means they can market their books, curricula, and assessments to schools, districts, and legislatures in forty-two states, Washington, D.C., and four territories by aligning their texts with the standards. Out of the forty-two states that adopted the CCSS, twenty-eight of them signed on to one of the two main assessment instruments for the initial testing in 2015: eleven states and Washington, D.C. took the PARCC exam (PARCC, 2015b) and seventeen states and one territory participated in the Smarter Balanced assessments (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium [SBAC], 2014). Analysis of the curricular materials and assessments thus offers insight into the potential impact of the CCSS across multiple states and classrooms.

Textbook as Genre and Social Practice

Writing textbooks have long held the interest of scholars in English studies for their effects on classroom pedagogy as well as their position in the ideological struggle to define writing and literacy. Tischio (2003) called for more studies of college writing textbooks because understanding "their influence on students, teachers, and composition pedagogy is … an important, if not indispensable, part of critiquing the larger ideological conditions for writing instruction" (p. 827). In other words, studying writing textbooks can help us understand the constructed subject positions of teachers and students as well as a theory or definition of writing advocated by the text. Writing textbooks also reflect broad public conversations of literacy and policy. Shohamy (2006) positioned textbooks as one of the "mechanisms" that enact a de facto language policy, or a set of explicit or implicit policies that "determine criteria for

language correctness, create definitions about language, and determine priority about language and how languages should be used, taught and learned" (p. 77). The authoritative writing style of textbooks—"this is the writing process," "follow these steps when reading"—conveys a certain surety that delimits the possibilities for student readers and writers, potentially misleading students into a prescriptive, one-size-fits-all approach to writing. Considering the compulsory nature of schooling, the adoption of a textbook plays an outsized role in determining the kinds of knowledge and skills valued in the classroom.

While the linguistic features of a textbook such as the use of imperatives and second person pronouns make it seem to be written for students ("Your assignment is to…"), researchers of textbooks across disciplines and education levels have shown that they are actually written for the teachers and administrators who adopt them, or, in some cases, state legislatures or education departments who will review them for approval (Graves, 1977; Miles, 2000; Swales, 1995). These curriculum materials become a site to view the multivoicedness of the text as the publishers attempt to meet the needs of its users and purchasers, different constituencies with potentially conflicting motives. While teachers might be more interested in the ways a textbook supports their own theory of writing, writing pedagogy, or the theories of the discipline, those who select the text may prioritize budgetary or assessment needs.[3]

These contradictions become visible as we trace the recontextualization of the standards through the Common Core implementation process. From a genre system perspective, a textbook serves as one of the textual links between the activity of the classroom and the goals of a larger institutional apparatus. Because they often provide writing prompts and instructions or guidelines for how to succeed on those prompts, writing textbooks represent how definitions of writing and the teaching of writing are operationalized in local practice. Intertextual analysis centered on these prompts and guidelines will help us to see how a theory of writing is transformed in implementation, and which actors and ideologies are more or less influential in the implementation process.

Recontextualizing A Theory of Writing

This analysis focuses on *SpringBoard*, a Common Core-aligned English Language Arts textbook and curriculum. Published by the College Board—whose current president and CEO, David Coleman, was one of the authors of the CCSS ELA Standards—*SpringBoard* seems to be a successful example of the push to market CCSS-aligned curricular materials nationally. According to marketing materials, "42 of the nation's top 100 largest school districts" had implemented *SpringBoard* by 2013, with a reach of "over 1.4 million students" (SpringBoard, 2013). It is currently approved for adoption in five states that require legislative approval, including the two biggest, California and Texas, and is used in "over 40 Florida districts" (SpringBoard, 2015). The *SpringBoard* Senior English textbook (College Board, 2014) examined in this article includes a full reprint of the Common Core grade-specific standards for reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language in the introductory section of the text (pp. xii-xvi).

As in the Common Core, argument takes a central place in the *SpringBoard* program, but the definitions and criteria for argumentative writing differ in meaningful ways. In the CCSS, argument is defined as a "reasoned, logical way of demonstrating that the writer's position, belief, or conclusion is valid" (NGA, 2010b, p. 23). According to the CCSS writers, argumentative writing can have different purposes, including "to change the reader's point of view, to bring about some action on the reader's part, or to ask the reader to accept the writer's explanation or evaluation of a concept, issue, or problem" (p. 23). These purposes include a focus on persuasion, but also remain open to argumentative writing as the intent to understand or accept a certain viewpoint. In the *SpringBoard* text, argumentative writing loses some of this complexity. For example, the first argumentative writingstates, "The purpose of argumentative writing is to change or influence the reader's perspective or cause the reader to take action" (College Board, 2014, p. 45). Notice how this description adopts the persuasive aspects of the CCSS definition, but elides the possibility for understanding or "asking" the reader to accept a position. Argument becomes synonymous with persuasion.

Notice also the authoritative nature of the statement: "The purpose of argumentative writing is…" Literature-based argumentative writing prompts further in the text ask students to write one argument that "defends the critical lens you feel provides modern society with the most compelling view of literature" (p. 230) and another that "argues for the use of a particular critical lens to interpret an event" (p. 290), prompts that seem to align more with the "accept the writer's explanation" aspect of the argumentative writing definition in the Common Core. However, the *SpringBoard* writers never make another direct statement about the purpose of argumentative writing as they do in this first assignment, nor do they offer an alternative to the "structure of an argument" I will describe below. These authoritative positions, consistent with generic expectations of textbook writing, limit possibilities for expansive understandings of argument and organization.

CCSS grade-specific standards for argument (Grades 11-12)	*SpringBoard* Argumentative Writing Prompt
Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using <u>valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence</u>. f) Introduce <u>precise</u>, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), <u>distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims</u>, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons and evidence. g) <u>Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly</u>, supplying the most <u>relevant evidence</u> for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the <u>audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases</u>. h) <u>Use</u> words, phrases, and clauses as well as <u>varied syntax</u> to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims. i) Establish and maintain a <u>formal style and objective tone</u> while <u>attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline</u> in which they are writing. j) Provide a <u>concluding</u> statement or section that <u>follows from</u> and supports <u>the argument presented</u>.	Be sure to: • Include a thesis statement that presents a clear perspective and <u>precise claim</u> on an issue to effect change. • Support claims with <u>valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence</u>. • <u>Distinguish your claim from alternate or opposing claims</u> while <u>developing counterclaims fairly and thoroughly</u>. • Consider your <u>audience's knowledge</u> about the topic, as well as their <u>values, concerns, and potential biases</u>. • Provide a <u>conclusion</u> that articulates the implications of the ideas presented and <u>follows from the argument presented</u>. • <u>Use varied syntax</u> and a <u>formal style with objective tone</u>.

Figure 3. Recontextualization of CCSS standards for argumentative writing (NGA, 2010a, p. 45) in the SpringBoard textbook (College Board, 2014, p. 45). Shared language is underlined.

The argumentative writing prompt recontextualizes the Common Core standards by borrowing specific language and using it in new ways. The Common Core Anchor Standard is divided into grade-specific standards, which offer a more detailed explanation of what students should be able to accomplish. These grade-specific standards are taken up in the guidelines for the first argumentative writing assignment in *SpringBoard*, which asks students to "write an argumentative essay that clearly identifies your perspective on a controversial issue about which you would like to bring about change" (College Board, 2010, p. 45). The writers then offer guidelines for succeeding on the assignment, reprinted in full in Figure 3.

We see through the underlined text that the textbook guidelines use much of the same language as the grade-specific standards. However, the textbook transforms the standards into more easily measurable segments. While the CCSS grade-specific standards present multiple goals or aspects of writing for each lettered item, the textbook guidelines simplify the intended outcomes. For example, the first two CCSS grade-specific standards are split into four guidelines in *SpringBoard*. As written, each guideline could be re-framed for a student checklist or as a question for evaluation, such as: Does the student include a thesis statement that presents a clear perspective and precise claim? This streamlining may allow for a more efficient teaching and evaluation mechanism, but omitted in the recontextualization are some of the complexities of writing, like logical organization, which becomes simplified in written instruction.

As Hillocks (2002) suggested in his study of state assessments, *logical* is the kind of general term often found in standards documents, but what makes for a logical sequence can only be understood by viewing grading criteria and sample student writing (p. 145). The Common Core State Standards (NGA, 2010c) do not offer specific grading criteria, but do provide annotated student samples to help clarify what it means to meet the standards at different grade levels. The sample for a grade 12 argument follows a five-paragraph theme: In the first paragraph, the writer includes a claim, concedes a point, and then refutes it; the next three paragraphs offer support for the writer's claim; and the conclusion reasserts the claim. In an annotation following the sample, the Common Core writers use the language of the anchor standards to describe why the student writing meets the standards, suggesting that this essay "logically sequences claim, counterclaims, reasoning, and evidence" (p. 46). Considering this is the only sample of argumentative writing provided for grades 11 and 12, the sample serves to show teachers and administrators, as well as textbook and assessment writers, that logical organizational structure means a five paragraph theme, itself an arhetorical construct that restricts student writers to considerations of form and correctness over purpose and context. As Schuster (2010) demonstrated, this form rarely manifests in the arguments of everyday life, or even in the arguments students are often asked to read in ELA courses.

While organization is not included in the *SpringBoard* guidelines for this argumentative writing assignment, the writers (College Board, 2014) do pick up on the CCSS explanation of logical structure in written instruction. In a section titled "Reviewing the Structure of an Argument," five "elements of an argument" are offered (p. 44) and students are instructed to use this section in peer

review "to guide your discussion and to make suggestions for revision" (p. 45). The list describes an essay that begins with a "Hook" that grabs the readers' attention, includes "The Claim" in the opening section that presents the author's main point, offers concessions, refutations, and support, and then closes with a call to action. This ordering of the elements matches the CCSS argumentative writing sample discussed above. Through these guidelines, the *SpringBoard* writers recontexualized the Common Core standard as a template for argumentative writing, a stance that seems to contradict the standards' own focus on audience, purpose, task, and disciplinary conventions.

A closer look at the "Reviewing the Structure of an Argument" section of the *SpringBoard* textbook reveals further tension between the textbook and the rhetorically situated aspects of the theory of writing advocated in the standards. Under the heading, "Concessions and Refutations," the *SpringBoard* writers (College Board, 2014) listed four characteristics marked by imperatives that tell the student writer what to do: "Recognize arguments…build credibility by showing…(apparent) objectivity…grant that the other side has some validity…argue against the opposing viewpoint" (p. 44). This use of imperatives serves to inform the student about the parts of argumentative writing while also commanding the student to follow them, limiting the authority of the student to question or manipulate the textbook advice. Kress (1987) explained that there are always power dynamics in reading and writing situations, and "the greater the power of the writer…the less the reader's opportunity to read against the grain without attracting…sanctions" (p. 129). In this case, the imperative forms demonstrate the power of the textbook writers, offering no sense of choice or opportunity for the student reader to question or to play with these elements. One can even imagine a student using these suggestions as sentence starters for one sentence or a paragraph about the opposing viewpoint to their position, something like: "I recognize the argument my opponents are making and I can see that their viewpoint has some validity, but my side has more validity because…" This template leaves out the possibility that the "opposing side" arguments may be based on faulty logic or untruths. Furthermore, all arguments are not a question of who has *more* validity to their claims, as there are times when the writer's goal may simply be to encourage a reader to understand a position.

The authority created by the textbook language thus constructs a passive student learner putting together the parts without necessarily understanding why. For example, in the guidelines describing of the structure of argument the elements themselves are granted agency: the hook "grabs readers' attention, may establish a connection between reader and writer and provide background information, and might be an anecdote, image, definition, or quotation" (College Board, 2014, p. 44). The hook itself is the subject of the sentence, conveying the sense that student writers just have to use one in order to write a successful argument. The other elements are presented similarly, conveying a writing process that asks students to mix and match these decontextualized elements of argument in order to create a product that can be evaluated as effective writing. This one-size-fits-all approach leads to formulaic thinking and writing.

By not specifying a task or audience and framing the instruction as a general explanation of argumentative writing, the textbook suggests an arhetorical, decontextualized theory of writing that perpetuates a one-size-fits-all-approach. Contrary to the CCSS call for consideration of task, purpose, audience, and disciplinary conventions, the textbook approach offers students only one possibility for argumentative writing, neglecting the fact that arguments with other purposes, in other disciplines, or in everyday life may or may not include the different elements mentioned in the textbook. It is an approach that can be efficiently evaluated, but does not reflect the rhetorical aspects of the theory of writing espoused by the standards.

Argument in Assessment Instruments

Analysis of the *SpringBoard* text shows how a theory of writing is simplified when Common Core writing standards are recontexualized as prompts and writing guidelines. While previous sections of this article demonstrated the transformation of a potentially rhetorically-situated definition of argumentative writing to a focus on general skills and rules that can be more efficiently evaluated, in this section the discussion moves to the PARCC writing assessment, another text in the system of Common Core implementation. Since the implementation of the standards necessitates a mechanism for determining whether students have met the intended outcomes, this assessment serves as another textual link between the activity of the classroom and institutional goals. A closer look at a sample prompt and the scoring rubric for the PARCC grade 11 ELA assessments can further demonstrate the ways in which the CCSS theory of writing is operationalized locally. Argumentative writing remains the focus because it is the most emphasized text type in the grades 11-12 standards.

The PARCC (2015a) sample test items used in preparation for the spring 2015 exam offered an example argumentative essay prompt. Students were to read a brief biography of Abigail Adams, and then two letters written between Adams and her husband, President John Adams. After reading, students were to "write an analytical essay" based on the following prompt:

> Both John and Abigail Adams believed strongly in freedom and independence. However, their letters suggest that each of them understood these terms differently based on their experiences.

> Write an essay that explains their contrasting views on the concepts of freedom and independence. In your essay, make a

claim about the idea of freedom and independence and how John and Abigail Adams add to that understanding and/or illustrate a misunderstanding of freedom and independence. Support your response with textual evidence and inferences drawn from all three sources.

This prompt offers a purpose ("make a claim about the idea of freedom and independence"), and through the primary texts offers students the data needed to provide support for their claims. However, the prompt does not suggest an audience. The CCSS writers (NGA, 2010a) called upon students to "take task, purpose, and audience into careful consideration" (p. 41), but in the sample prompt identifies only the task ("write an essay") and purpose. The PARCC grading criteria (2014) similarly reflect this omission of audience (see Figure 4). As is clear from the minimal underlining in Figure 4, the scoring rubric borrows only minimal language from the Common Core grade-specific standards. General words without objective definitions—*appropriate, effective, relevant,* and *purposeful*—dominate the descriptors, but the focus on knowledge or audience is completely absent. Note also the expanded focus on issues of correctness in the rubric. The "Knowledge of Language and Conventions" section introduces the generalized conventions of "standard English" along with an explicit emphasis on error. These additions highlight form and mechanics in a way that contributes to the reduction of a context-based theory of writing to a set of decontextualized skills.

CCSS grade-specific standards for argument (Grades 11-12)	PARCC grading criteria for argument writing
Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and <u>relevant</u> and sufficient <u>evidence</u>. a) Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons and evidence. b) Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge c) Use words, phrases, and clauses as well as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims. d) <u>Establish</u> and maintain a formal <u>style</u> and objective tone while <u>attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline</u> in which they are writing. e) Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.	*Written Expression* The student response: • addresses the prompt and provides **effective and comprehensive** development of the claim or topic that is **consistently appropriate** to the task by using **clear and convincing** reasoning supported by **relevant textual** <u>evidence</u>; • demonstrates **purposeful** coherence, clarity, and cohesion, making it **easy to follow** the writer's progression of ideas; • establishes and maintains an **effective** style, <u>attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline</u> *Knowledge of Language and Conventions* The student response to the prompt demonstrates **full command** of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There may be a **few minor errors** in mechanics, grammar, and usage, but **meaning is clear**.

Figure 4. Recontextualization of CCSS standards for argumentative writing (NGA, 2010a, p. 45) in the PARCC (2014) scoring rubric. Underlined words and phrases demonstrate shared language. Bold terms were emphasized in the original.

These findings largely reflect Hillocks's (2002) study of state assessments, in which he noted that the theory underlying the standards "loses breadth and vigor" in the process of designating certain kinds of text types for assessment (p. 53). In this case, the recontextualization of writing standards demonstrates the transformation of a potentially rhetorical theory of writing with clear focus on task, audience, and purpose into something more easily accessible and regulated. There is no audience named in the sample prompt, which undercuts the standards' focus on rhetorical appropriateness. The grading rubric also emphasizes issues of correctness through a focus on error, eliding the CCSS attempt to foreground content and development of ideas. While the sample PARCC exam does make some improvements over the exams in Hillocks's study by prompting for evidence-based arguments and including data (in this case, other texts) for students to use as support, in the end the grading criteria and the assessment format still tend to minimize a focus on content and rhetorical awareness in favor of general form and correctness.

The activities of all actors in public education, including policymakers, administrators, teachers, and students are mediated through the CCSS, whether they are discussing policy, designing curricula, or assessing student writing. The standards as a genre of policy action and their related genres of implementation (exam prompts, rubrics, textbooks, etc.) thus stabilize classroom activities and the work of everyone involved. The Common Core-aligned textbook and sample assessment have recontextualized the standards, simplifying a theory of writing into easy to regulate forms. In the next section, I analyze these genres in relationship to each other and the broader education reform process.

Defining and Teaching Writing in an "Audit Culture"

Considering a transformation of writing theory through a genre system lens allows us to trace the relationships between macro-level forces (education policy) and localized classroom practice. This approach provides evidence to support McComiskey's (2012) fear of "the assessment instruments written by publishing companies as a means to sell textbooks" (p. 539). While the implementation of the Common Core has not led to the standardization of curricula or a nationalized education program as some opponents have argued, it is not due to lack of effort on the part of education publishers. The implementation apparatus has reinforced a market-based ideology of education that de-emphasizes local practice in favor of large-scale efficiency.

As Apple (2004) has argued, the logic of a market-based "audit culture" requires all actors to be available for measurement at any time. As such, the work must be quantifiable and consistently evaluated. Everything—including writing—must become a consumable good in a market-based education system. In the case of the Common Core, a relatively rhetorical theory of writing emphasizing audience, purpose, and task is reduced in grading criteria to discrete writing skills able to be easily measured. Through this process, the potential for teaching and learning the rhetorical nature of communication, or why different choices make writing work in real context, gets sidelined for a focus on generalized notions of form and correctness available for efficient evaluation.

Apple (2004) explained that the process of "conservative modernisation" requires a significant transformation in which aspects of our lives and institutions that were not formerly part of market relations must be turned into part of a market. He suggested that the following must take place in order to do so:

1. The services or goods that are to be focused upon must be reconfigured so they can indeed be bought and sold.
2. People who received these things from the state must be convinced to want to buy them.
3. The working conditions and outlook of the employees who work in this sector must be transformed from a model based on collective understandings and providing service to "the public" on the one hand to working to produce profits for owners and investors and subject to market discipline on the other.
4. When business moves into what were previously non-market fields, as much as possible their risks must be underwritten by the state. (p. 12)

Analysis of the system of implementation makes visible the ways the teaching and learning of writing is transformed into being part of a market in the Common Core implementation process. First, this transformation has been supported by the state through monetary incentives. The mass adoption of the Common Core was facilitated through the federal Race to the Top program, which offered funding to states that adopted the Common Core as their state standards. These monies have also been used for curriculum purchases, including the Common Core-aligned assessments and curricula. These genres of implementation transform the teaching of writing into a marketable good to be bought and sold in the form of textbooks and test preparation materials.

Genres of implementation circumscribe the classroom activity of teachers, demonstrating the ways their working conditions have been transformed in the audit culture. Most obviously, textbooks and assessments exert influence on classroom practice as they codify the kinds of writing valued. Compounding this influence, English Language Arts teachers are not often trained in teaching writing or teaching to these new standards, which allows textbooks to step in to represent both pedagogy and a curriculum (Connors, 1986; Graves, 1977). Analysis of the ways the CCSS is recontextualized in *SpringBoard* indicates the growing influence of publishers and policymakers and the lessening influence of teachers on the work that goes on in their classrooms. In addition to its impact on instruction through the genres of implementation, the constant attention to assessment in the audit culture also makes the work of teachers subject to market discipline, especially when teacher employment and evaluation is connected to student performance. In the audit culture, teaching is transformed from public service to manufacturing with individual student achievement as the product, a transformation reflected in the writing standards' focus on instrumental aims. We see this ideology revealed as we trace genres from policy talk to the classroom.

The instrumental ideology that undergirds the standards is made visible in the genres of implementation, which package writing— and education—as a product to be bought and sold. The publishers of *SpringBoard* even identify the student textbook as the "Consumable Student Edition" on the bottom right corner of the cover. The marketplace language in the implementation of the standards positions students not as producers of writing but as passive consumers of writing skills, learning to utilize different discreet "elements" of writing without an understanding of why or how these elements might be effective. When the textbook offers writing strategies like identifying the structure of an argument, the guidelines are presented as authoritative, negating possibility for student choice. These authoritative guidelines present a writing process that encourages students to mix and match these consumable goods (the elements of argument) in order to create a product that can be sold as effective writing. When textbooks present such writing advice, students are likely to view this advice as rules to be followed; the textbooks and standards contribute to a de facto language policy (Kress, 1987; Rose, 1981; Shohamy, 2006). The CCSS identifies the types of writing that are valuable and even some of the evaluative measures in the grade-specific standards, and then the textbook turns these standards into to prompts and guidelines which become de facto instruction. The supposed "what" of the standards turns into "how," and the potentials for student writing are restricted. The rhetorical understanding of effective writing based on understanding of task, purpose, and audience becomes a one-size-fits-all template.

The PARCC sample assessment further demonstrates this conflict with the rhetorical aspects evident in the Common Core theory of

writing. While the textbook maintains a discussion of audience in its criteria, the sample assessment neglects audience in the sample prompt and the scoring rubric. This perpetuates a problematic, decontextualized view of writing that ignores the role of audience in shaping content, purpose, and other rhetorical strategies; the generalized rubric transforms the standards from relatively complex to simplistic. This narrowed theory of writing lends itself to efficient evaluation across schools, districts, and states, further strengthening the audit culture.

Conclusion

Standards impact teaching and learning. When the effect of the Common Core writing standards on classroom practice is viewed through the sequence of genres that ultimately mediate the activities of the classroom, it is clear how the standards become something more than only outcomes or goals. The standards supply a theory of writing and the kinds of writing to be evaluated, and implementation materials focus on these valued forms, simplifying the standards to the most easily accessible components. The grade-specific standards for argument, for example, were recontextualized as writing guidelines in a twelfth grade English language arts textbook. The text's authoritative position in classroom activity transformed the goals provided by the standards into commands. Student writers were then positioned as passive consumers, mixing and matching the "parts" to create a written product for evaluation.

The genres of implementation discussed in this article have evolved to meet recurring social needs, and are limited by generic constraints. The assessment, for example, serves to evaluate learning (and teaching) and to regulate the activity of schools. The open-response essay question has evolved with the influence of the CCSS, offering data (in the form of texts) for students to use in constructing their arguments, but generic rubrics that facilitate efficient rating sessions emphasize general writing skills and correctness at the expense of attention to audience and the writing situation. At the same time, the textbook organizes the work of classrooms by making visible the kinds of knowledge and language valued by the institution. This is not to say that the textbook replaces the teacher or even that a teacher does not have the agency to manipulate the textbook to his or her own pedagogy. However, the generic features of textbooks create the impression of rules for student writers. Textbooks take on an authoritative role.

Each of these examples point to the impact of these genres on language policy. Gallagher (2012) has suggested that an institutional focus on outcomes "tends to limit and compromise the educational experiences of teachers and students" (p. 43), an effect corroborated in this analysis. Shohamy (2006) claimed that textbooks serve as mechanisms in a de facto language policy, telling students what kinds of writing and language is or is not valuable. Clearly the assessments do as well, as the PARCC rubric transformed the standards into a test of decontextualized writing skills and an expanded focus on correctness. Generalized, discreet skills are still valued over rhetorical awareness.

Finally, the genre system approach illuminated the top-down nature of standards-based education reform efforts in the era of conservative modernization, and pointed out the growing influence of publishers and policymakers on defining the teaching and learning of writing. The Common Core writing standards are not ideal, but they do identify a more complex, situated theory of writing than most of the state standards described in Hillocks's (2002) study of state assessments under NCLB. However, the accountability mandate and the focus on "raising standards" perpetuate the audit culture of constant evaluation. These are political, educational, and economic motivations at cross-purposes, and following the genres allows us to see where the influence lies. Apple (2004) argued that the result of the audit culture is a "re-centralization" of power that leads to "de-democratization" (p. 14). We can see this re-centralization of power through the genres of implementation (see Figure 1). Publishers are aware that assessments and textbooks are often selected and purchased by state legislators, policymakers, or administrators, and there is little incentive to promote a complex understanding of writing when the needs of the audit culture call for constant, efficient evaluations. Even as the Common Core-aligned textbook follows the standards toward a more capacious conception of literacy reflected in *SpringBoard* assignments based on films, photo essays, and documentaries, the writing assignments in the textbook remain arhetorical and decontextualized, a reflection of the need for one-size-fits-all assessment. Until the assessment instruments are able to provide multiple modes for conveying student writing practices, the twenty-first century literacy skills the CCSS claim to emphasize will not actually look much different from the literacy expectations of the previous decades.

But while this genre system analysis seems to imply a unidirectional flow of influence, it is important to remember that these standards, assessments, and textbooks can be contested and changed. Genres predict, but do not define structure and activity, and people and groups can appropriate or change genres to achieve new goals (Russell, 1997). Already, resistance to the Common Core implementation has challenged the rigidity of some of these genres. Some schools and districts have even sought to re-appropriate the textbook. For example, New York State used twenty-eight million dollars of Race to the Top funds to support curriculum development in line with the Common Core rather than relying on textbook publishers to provide content (Monahan, 2015). This initiative led to EngageNY, a website that provides Common Core-related curriculum designed by nonprofit organizations free for use by any New York school or district. EngageNY has not eliminated textbook purchases in New York schools, but may demonstrate the potential for altering current generic models or changing the implementation structure altogether. Further research might investigate how or if removing textbooks from the economic motives of publishing companies provides an opportunity to change the genres of classroom materials. It must be noted that this challenging of conventional practices is easier for

higher-performing schools not under threat of sanctions through the testing apparatus, as lower-performing schools cannot afford to wait and explore other options (Monahan, 2015). A more equitable system relies upon challenging policy talk in a way that alters motivations of actors involved in the production of the genres of implementation. If genres like textbooks and assessments are to reflect a complex understanding of writing that truly represents "what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century" (NGA, 2010a, p. 3), then those interested in reform must find ways to challenge the audit culture.

Notes

1. See Trimbur (1991) for more on the effects of the "rhetoric of crisis" in recent U.S. history.
2. While I agree with McComiskey (2012) that there is much to like in the CCSS, there remains room for critique. See Gewertz (2013) for an overview of the controversy surrounding the Common Core reading standards. Beach (2011), Bomer and Maloch (2012), and Schuster (2010) took on the writing standards for their implicit formalism, conflicted theoretical foundation, and inattention to the ways writing works in the world. DeStigter (2015) challenged the assumptions behind the prominence of argumentative writing in the CCSS. Zancanella and Moore (2014) described some of the conflicting interests behind the development of the standards.
3. For some readers, the fact that teachers *are* often the writers of textbooks may seem to cloud this argument. However, there are no authors credited in the *SpringBoard* text (College Board, 2014) analyzed in this article. The text acknowledges by name nine "classroom teachers and writers who have been integral to the development of this revised program" as well as an English Language Arts Development staff at the College Board (iii), but it is impossible to know what role these teachers had in developing the content, assignments, criteria, guidelines, etc. Authorship of this text is distributed, leaving no party to be considered the "writer" of the text. Exploring the implications of this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this article. See Miles (2000) for a call to challenge the conservatism of First-Year Writing textbooks through strategic use of teacher and administrator agency.

Acknowledgments

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