

Knowledge, Literacy, and the Common Core

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Much attention has been paid to the call in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), 2010) for more reading and writing of informational text in the elementary grades. Indeed, in the context of the CCSS, informational text is on even footing with literature—perhaps for the first time ever. It would be possible to respond to the call for more attention to informational texts by simply changing the balance of different text types used for instructional purposes. In this article, we discuss why this approach would miss of the intent of the CCSS and why we should focus attention on using the opportunity of reading more informational text to build students’ disciplinary and world knowledge. We suggest that the critical message of the CCSS is the need to support students in developing knowledge *for* and *through* reading.

To understand how knowledge should and can be foregrounded in ELA instruction, we develop three points:

- The increased attention to nonfiction texts in the Common Core stems from the emphasis on knowledge.
- Knowledge and comprehension are synergistically connected to one another.
- ELA instruction needs to be multifaceted to ensure that existing knowledge is activated and new knowledge (and ways of gaining new knowledge) is built.

The CCSS Focuses on Disciplinary Knowledge

Compared with the focus on five areas of reading instruction specified by the National Reading Panel (NICHD, 2000) and compared with many states’ English Language Arts (ELA)

standards, the CCSS for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects place much greater attention on genre-specific and, later, discipline specific reading and writing practices. In doing so, the CCSS represent a fundamental shift toward the inclusion of more informational text and related instruction, beginning in kindergarten.

A close reading of the CCSS shows that the purpose of increasing attention to informational texts is not simply for students to have a greater appreciation of and facility with a range of text genres. It is so students build knowledge and are prepared to read and write as they engage in disciplinary study. The CCSS indicate that knowledge development and reading development are closely linked: “by reading texts in history/social studies, science, and other disciplines, *students build a foundation of knowledge in these fields that will also give them the background to be better readers in all content areas* (NGA Center for Best Practices & CCSSO, 2010, p., 10, emphasis added). The CCSS call for a curriculum that is “intentionally and coherently structured to develop rich content knowledge within and across grades” (p. 10).

Further evidence of the focus on knowledge development comes from the seven key indicators of College and Career Readiness for ELA/Literacy. The third indicator states that students who meet the standards “build strong content knowledge... [They] establish a base of knowledge across a wide range of subject matter by engaging with works of quality and substance.... They read purposefully and listen attentively to gain both general knowledge and discipline-specific expertise. They refine and share their knowledge through writing and speaking” (NGA Center for Best Practices & CCSSO, 2010, p. 7).

In light of the call for knowledge development in the CCSS, we as educators have another opportunity to turn our collective attention to intentional support for knowledge

development from the earliest years of schooling. It is important to acknowledge, however, that it may be this aspect of the CCSS that requires the greatest departure from current practice. Over the last few decades, elementary-level reading instruction has attended more to the processes of reading (e.g., decoding skills and reading comprehension strategies) than to the content of the texts.

In the sections that follow, we summarize what research has to say about the role of knowledge in reading comprehension and we describe ways to increase the focus on knowledge within ELA. It is important to note that, although we refer to knowledge or information, we are not referring to discrete factual knowledge. The kinds of knowledge that have the potential to support reading comprehension and generally enrich students' lives cannot be reduced to a list of facts, as has occurred in some interpretations of knowledge building (Hirsch, Kett, & Trefil, 2002). In line with the CCSS, we mean the kinds of disciplinary understandings that support reading and learning within content areas. We use the term *knowledge* because it is the term selected by the CCSS to represent discipline-relevant learning and also because much of the relevant research uses this term, though the definitions of knowledge in this work vary considerably.

We also want to caution that, although we focus on disciplinary knowledge and informational text in this essay, in alignment with the focus of this special journal issue, the emphasis on disciplinary knowledge should not be taken as an attempt to diminish the importance of other kinds of knowledge. The world knowledge that students acquire in their lives outside of school and the knowledge that students gain through the study of the human condition in narrative text are important in their own rights and are also meaningful supports for students' literacy development.

Knowledge and Comprehension are Synergistically Related

Reading is the process of meaning construction and knowledge building, not simply an exercise where students prove to a teacher (or a test maker) that they can recall the content of a text immediately after reading. The aim is not simply to teach students to read for the sake of having reading proficiency and remembering content faithfully but reading to acquire and expand upon ideas. The research literature is rich with evidence that comprehension and knowledge building are inextricably interwoven. Documentation is particularly strong for three ways in which knowledge supports and fuels comprehension.

Knowledge Supports Comprehension

Few aspects of reading are better documented or less disputed than the role of an individual's knowledge in comprehending and learning from text. The research has been extensive enough that a fairly elaborated picture of the interaction between knowledge and comprehension is available.

First, both knowledge of the topic of a text and also general world knowledge have been found to influence comprehension. This pattern holds for readers across the lifespan--elementary students, middle school students, undergraduate students, and adult professionals (Alexander, Murphy, Woods, Duhon, & Parker, 1997; Pearson, Hansen, & Gordon, 1979; Recht & Leslie, 1988). In addition, these effects have been documented across different text genres, including expository texts and fictional narratives (Recht & Leslie, 1988). Pearson et al.'s (1979) classic study demonstrates well the influence of topical knowledge on readers' comprehension. After reading an information-rich narrative text about spiders, second graders who had a strong schema of spiders (i.e., high levels of knowledge) were able to answer both text-explicit questions (i.e., information explicitly stated in the text) and script-implicit questions (i.e., information not

explicitly stated in the text such as the part of a spider's body that resembles part of a snake's body) at significantly higher levels than students with more limited knowledge of spiders.

Second, general world knowledge, not simply topic- or domain-specific knowledge associated with a text, has also been found to aid comprehension. Best, Floyd, and McNamara (2008) studied the impact of general world knowledge on third graders' comprehension of a narrative story and an expository text on the needs of plants. General world knowledge did not predict readers' comprehension of the narrative text, but it did predict students' comprehension of an expository text.

The Pearson et al. (1979) study illustrates another important finding in the research on knowledge and comprehension: knowledge supports inferencing and higher-level comprehension processes, not simply remembering information that is contained in the text. Similarly, Taft and Leslie (1985) found that third grade students who had high levels of background knowledge related to a passage about food chains were better able to answer questions requiring recall of information in a single sentence in the text, questions that required students to combine information from different parts of a passage, and questions that required students to combine information from the passage with prior knowledge.

The finding that knowledge supports inferencing is an important one to bear in mind in light of perspectives on close reading that have been associated with the CCSS (Coleman & Pimenthal, 2012). It has been suggested that readers should stay "within the four corners of the text" and that connections to background knowledge should be minimized. But writers, especially writers of complex texts, assume that their readers will be able to fill in gaps and make connections. Consider the following excerpt from a text on astronauts (Lock, 2013): "Some people really can look down from the sky. They can look at Earth from space. They are

astronauts. Astronauts fly into space” (unnumbered). In this excerpt, the writer assumes background knowledge on the part of readers that astronauts travel in vehicles such as spaceships and do not fly in the manner of birds. The writer also assumes that readers can make the connection between the sky and space, as evident in the lack of a description or connection between sky and space. In any text—even a text oriented to beginning readers such as this example—writers assume that readers will draw on a schema related to the topic and, using this schema, will use relevant knowledge.

Finally, while knowledge aids comprehension for all students, having a knowledge base can be particularly beneficial for students with lower levels of reading skill (Adams, Bell, & Perfetti, 1995; Miller & Keenan, 2009; Recht & Leslie, 1988). Typically, students with lower levels of reading skill understand and recall less from their reading (especially important points) than their more proficient peers. But, when poor readers have knowledge relevant to the content of a text, they recall more information from text, especially central knowledge (Miller & Keenan, 2009). Knowledge about a topic can compensate for reading skills, as shown by Recht and Leslie (1988). They had middle-school students read a passage about baseball. Students with high prior knowledge about baseball performed better than those with low baseball knowledge on a range of comprehension tasks. Reading ability did not compensate for low knowledge; that is, students with high reading ability but low knowledge about baseball did not perform better on the recall or summarization tasks than students with low reading ability and low knowledge of baseball. Moreover, there was no benefit for high reading ability over high knowledge. That is, students with high reading ability and high knowledge also did not perform better on recall or summarization tasks than did students with low reading ability and high knowledge.

This effect has been called a “trading relationship” between knowledge and skills where knowledge provides some compensation for low levels of general reading skill (Adams et al., 1990) and a “knowledge compensation hypothesis” (Miller & Kennan, 2009) where poorer readers are able to construct a mental representation of the text by leveraging prior knowledge. These findings are especially critical to consider with struggling readers. Often the emphasis with this group is on developing skills. But, as Guthrie et al. (2004) have demonstrated, the engagement of struggling readers is low in skill-driven instruction. Grounding reading instruction in topics about which struggling readers have bodies of knowledge and/or interest may mean greater comprehension and engagement and, as a result, may create momentum toward skilled reading. Cultivating knowledge in schools—rather than simply the skills of reading—could support efforts to stop the downward spiral that Stanovich (1986) described with poor readers.

Knowledge May Help Readers Contend with Complex and Ambiguous Texts

High knowledge of a text’s topic also aids readers in making sense of complex and ambiguous text—the kinds of texts that they increasingly encounter in sophisticated content-area learning. In a study of how knowledge shapes interpretation of text, participants enrolled in a weight-lifting class or an educational psychology class for music education students read two passages—each with two possible interpretations (prison/wrestling and cards/music) (Anderson, Reynolds, Schallert, & Goetz, 1977). The participants not only responded to questions about the passage in ways that were consistent with their backgrounds but they also included statements in their retellings that clarified ambiguous passages in ways that were related to their backgrounds.

Higher knowledge readers seem to spend more time making sense of ambiguous text, which helps them understand and remember what they read. McNamara and Kintsch (1996)

found that both students who initially had high knowledge of a text topic (the Vietnam war) and those who initially had low knowledge, but were provided with knowledge pre-training, spent more time reading a low coherence text than did low knowledge participants. In addition, lower coherence in text seems to drive higher-knowledge readers to integrate text ideas with prior knowledge (Long, Wilson, Hurley, & Prat, 2006). High knowledge readers process low coherence text more actively; when high knowledge readers read low coherence texts, they reported having vivid memories of ideas from the text (Long et al., 2006).

Topic Knowledge May Support the Acquisition and Use of Reading Comprehension Strategies

In recent decades, a great deal of attention has been paid to the instruction of a range of reading comprehension strategies that students can use to make sense of text and overcome obstacles to comprehension. We have paid less attention to the role of knowledge in learning and effectively employing strategies, although instructing reading comprehension strategies has been shown to be more effective when readers have prior knowledge about topics. Gaultney (1995) demonstrated the facilitative effect of knowledge on use of comprehensions strategies in a study of fourth-grade boys who were both poor readers and baseball experts. The students were trained in the comprehension strategy of asking *why* questions using either baseball stories or nonbaseball stories. Those who were trained with baseball stories demonstrated better acquisition of the strategy and asked more why questions in both immediate and delayed posttests than the students trained with non-baseball stories. Gaultney suggests that the use of materials for which participants had a great deal of expert knowledge allowed them to read and comprehend more easily, allowing more capacity to be devoted to learning the comprehension strategy.

Further evidence of the effect of knowledge on use of comprehension strategies comes from a study of high-school students—half from the U.S. and half from the Pacific island nation of Palau—thinking aloud about passages that were relevant to either an American or a Palauan context. With culturally familiar texts, readers (e.g., American students reading the American-relevant passage) were more likely to leverage background knowledge for comprehension and were more likely to attempt to develop intersentential ties (i.e., connections across different parts of a text). With unfamiliar texts (e.g., American students reading the Palauan-relevant passage), readers were more likely to use strategies such as rereading for developing awareness, accepting ambiguity, and establishing intrasentential ties—those associated with developing an understanding of the text. Readers also had better recall of the culturally familiar text than the unfamiliar text—differences which may be related to strategy use.

Although many of these findings have been well established for decades, there is little evidence that literacy education has focused attention on knowledge development through and for reading, even as the professional literature and commercial reading programs have increasingly emphasized the reading of informational texts. At least in the last-generation of core reading programs, Norris et al. (2008) found that instruction of informational texts with science content in the programs emphasized personal reflection and response, rather than critical science concepts. The goal of including more science texts in basal programs seemed to be on exposure to and experience with texts of different genres, not development of discipline-specific literacy practices or content knowledge.

Knowledge Enhancement Should be Central in CCSS ELA Instruction

Our third claim is that the knowledge should be a construct around which CCSS ELA instruction revolves. The reason for comprehension activity and instruction, we argue, is to

establish the knowledge that students acquire from their reading—to evaluate its veracity, connect it to other content, and to develop dispositions and strategies that support high levels of learning. Comprehension is not an “exercise” but a context for establishing the knowledge that students acquire from their reading of texts.

Distinguishing Between Knowledge Activation and Knowledge Building

The reading education community has enthusiastically embraced the strategy of activating knowledge as a way of helping readers bring their existing knowledge to bear on text comprehension. In general, knowledge activation is a useful strategy, helping teachers get insight into their students’ knowledge of the text’s topic and supporting students’ comprehension, at least when the knowledge activated is relevant and correct. Although readers automatically activate their existing knowledge as they read, activities that prompt students to surface relevant knowledge are often supportive of students’ comprehension, especially for weaker comprehenders (Hansen & Pearson, 1983).

However, it is not clear that all knowledge activation activities support comprehension. When texts contain counter-intuitive information that is incompatible with students’ existing ideas about a topic, activating prior knowledge (without building new knowledge or attending to the discrepancies) can inhibit students’ comprehension (Alvermann & Hague, 1989). That is, merely activating the readers’ conflicting or incorrect ideas without helping students to understand the discrepancy between their explanation and the information provided in the text does not support students’ comprehension of the text and may, in fact, undermine it.

In addition, teachers need to ensure that the knowledge being activated is relevant to the text. Many knowledge activation activities described in reading program lesson guides miss the mark. For example, eliciting students’ background knowledge on farms (e.g., Have you ever

been to a petting zoo?) as a prelude to *Charlotte's Web* is unlikely to support students' comprehension of the themes of friendship and collaboration within a community or using the text to build knowledge on these themes.

In part as a response to an overemphasis on knowledge activation practices (which can consume more time than the reading itself), the architects of the CCSS, Coleman and Pimenthal (2012), identified that instruction should stay “within the four corners of the text.” This has been interpreted to mean that drawing on any prior knowledge is inappropriate. There is a need to correct for the egregious practices of the past where false schema can be elicited or where valuable instructional time and reading time is spent on activating prior knowledge tangentially related to the text. It is also the case that preteaching and activation activities can be so revealing as to obviate the need to read the text at all (McNamara & Kintsch, 1996). We want students to encounter novel information in texts and to encounter the kinds of comprehension challenges that provide genuine opportunities to apply strategies.

A re-examination of appropriate activities for activation and building of background knowledge is required but proposals that background knowledge should be minimized or even actively discouraged are misguided (e.g., Coleman & Pimenthal, 2012). Several decades of compelling research on the critical role of knowledge in comprehension cannot—should not—be ignored. Existing practices and patterns of knowledge activation need to be revisited but that is only one of the responses required to design ELA programs that support students in building bodies of knowledge through reading.

For knowledge to be a linchpin of CCSS/ELA instruction, we need to shift attention to building knowledge in addition to activating and leveraging the knowledge that students bring to a particular text. Building knowledge involves more than making connections between students'

existing knowledge and the information in the text. In the sections that follow, we discuss strategies for ensuring school is filled with opportunities for knowledge building—across the curriculum and as part of the work of reading and comprehending texts in English Language Arts.

Instructional Practices that Support Knowledge Activation and Knowledge Building

Content-Area Learning

The most important way to ensure that students are building knowledge for future reading and disciplinary study is to engage them in rich and substantial content-area learning filled with opportunities for reading, writing, and discussion. The richness afforded by the joining together of reading, writing, talk, and ongoing investigations and inquiries invites a depth of understanding that is difficult to achieve through reading alone. For example, to understand the concept of shadows (which can be a factor in a narrative as well as an informational text), students need to have some fundamental understandings of light, and they need opportunities to engage with shadows through systematic firsthand experiences.

Content-area instruction is an obvious site for the development of disciplinary knowledge, but content instruction can also be a supportive context for literacy development. Several programs of research have demonstrated that literacy development is accelerated when instruction in reading and writing is situated in ongoing, content-area study (e.g., Guthrie et al., 2004; Romance & Vitale, 2001). Joining literacy instruction with content-area instruction has been shown to increase students' conceptual learning, reading motivation, use of comprehension strategies, and overall reading comprehension (e.g., Cervetti, Barber, Dorph, Pearson, & Goldschmidt, 2012; Guthrie et al., 2004; Romance & Vitale, 2001).

There is compelling evidence that growth in reading engagement and reading comprehension is accelerated when students are involved in reading real texts for real purposes such as making an argument, applying a concept in some way, or engaging in a firsthand investigation (e.g., Knapp, 1995; Purcell-Gates, Duke, & Martineau, 2007). Moreover, it is in meaningful tasks, such as content-area study, that students come to understand the nature and the purposes of reading (Turner, 1995). Isolating the mechanics of reading from meaning-making makes reading an exercise or a game, and it seems to invite unproductive understandings about reading, including the belief that fast word recognition is good reading. When reading is associated with learning and inquiry as part of content-area study, students come to see reading as a way of seeking information, insight, and enjoyment. Content-area learning offers opportunities to teach and apply literacy strategies in the context of pursuing other goals.

Currently, it appears that time devoted to content-area instruction is shrinking. The shift in instructional time toward English language arts and mathematics following the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act resulted in dramatic reductions in time spent in subjects such as science, social studies, and art. In a 2006-2007 survey, the Center on Education Policy found, for example, that 58% of school districts had increased time devoted to ELA instruction by an average of 141 minutes per week, while 36% of districts reported reducing time devoted to social studies by an average of 76 minutes per week (McMurrer, 2008). Perhaps the biggest injury to knowledge enhancement would be the further expansion of ELA time at the expense of content-area learning.

Though knowledge building through content-area instruction is an essential part of preparing students for reading and disciplinary learning, ELA instruction is also an essential

context for knowledge-building. We identify central ideas to the enhancement of knowledge in ELA instruction through (a) selection of texts, (b) talk about text, and (c) writing.

Knowledge enhancement through the selection of texts. Texts have the potential to be significant resources for knowledge development; however, much depends on the texts we select. It is in part in the selection of texts where choices about knowledge-enhancement are made. In an ideal world, students would always be reading meaningful texts and all of these texts would be connected to themes, experiences, or other texts. For example, reading in thematic text sets increases the likelihood that students will encounter the same words and concepts, facilitating their ease of reading and building their knowledge.

Enhancement of knowledge cannot simply be accomplished by ensuring that more informational texts are the focus of instruction. With the introduction of the CCSS, we have seen a strong focus on text genre, including focus on the ratio of informational to narrative texts, rather than a focus on the knowledge that students are to be gaining from text.

Teachers can use content-area standards as a guide for the selection of themes for reading, so students are building knowledge across the school day. For example, one of the authors of this article is developing a second grade English Language Arts unit based on the CCSS informational text standards, including standards related to using informational text features (RI.2.5) and engaging in research and writing projects using multiple sources (W.2.7). In doing so, she has been guided in the selection of topics for the research and writing by the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS Lead States, 2013). She has chosen an outcome statement from the related to understanding habitats and biodiversity as a guide for the topic of the research and writing students will do in English Language Arts. By coordinating across the two sets of standards, the author of the unit is working to ensure that students are building knowledge that

will support their informational reading and writing. In forming connections to content-area learning, we ensure that the knowledge we develop through reading is deep rather than superficial, conceptual rather than factual.

Knowledge enhancement through talk about text. The research literature is full of evidence of the critical role of discussion on knowledge building (e.g., Murphy, Wilkinson, Soter, Hennessey, & Alexander, 2009). Although there is still much to learn about how discourse helps students construct knowledge, studies have shown that peer discussions supports the development of content-area understandings partly because they provide opportunities for students to share information—from prior knowledge and understood and recalled from the text—that, taken together, contributes to more coherent understandings (e.g., Rivard & Straw, 2000). In addition, students can also use dialogue to talk through, clarify, integrate, and negotiate their growing understandings with others, forms of processing ideas that ultimately support knowledge development (Gee, 2004; Rivard & Straw, 2000).

Moreover, discussions allow for teacher monitoring and feedback in a manner that is more immediate than teachers' responses to written work. Discussions led by reflective teachers allow for insights into evidence that students may not have understood from a text or many have missed altogether. Discussions that build knowledge are based on evidence in the text, not the free-ranging conversations in which students bring in anything vaguely related to the content of the text. In particular, questions that ask the readers to determine “why” and “how” should outnumber questions of “what, where and when.” Why and how questions direct students' attention to important information in a text acts as a comprehension monitoring tool by helping students recognize they don't understand and helps students leverage existing knowledge and

construct new knowledge throughout the process of reading a text, not just before reading (Hartman, 1995).

One of the constructs around which talk can be expected to occur in CCSS classrooms is close reading. This is the term that is used in many journals and articles oriented to teachers as well as in-service and conference titles. The phrase “close reading” itself does not appear in the Standards themselves but drives from the Publishers’ Guidelines (Coleman & Pimenthal, 2012). Our preference is to stay with the guidelines from the standards where the idea underlying close reading is described as using evidence from the text as the primary source for interpretation. Reading for evidence describes the action on the part of students. The text is being used to identify evidence that builds, refutes, or elaborates knowledge. Readers are asked to indicate where in the text they got the ideas that they did.

As critical as the questions that teachers ask students to locate evidence in text are the questions that students generate themselves. Teaching students to generate their own questions while reading both activates knowledge and helps them build knowledge during reading (Taboada & Guthrie, 2006). Again, the emphasis should be on questions that focus on main concepts and essential relationships. Indeed, such a strategy seems to resonate more closely with “staying with the text” rather than free-ranging interpretations of text. When Taboada and Guthrie controlled for the amount of students’ prior knowledge in establishing the level of new knowledge, these kinds of questions helped students build new knowledge.

Teaching students to ask questions—and teachers learning to ask questions that delve into the evidence in the text—takes time. But when students are taught to delve into evidence, habits of mind can be built. Even upper-primary students can learn to go to the text to answer questions,

including questions require integration between prior knowledge and textual information (Brandão & Oakhill, 2005).

Knowledge enhancement through writing. Writing is a central part of knowledge-enhancing instruction in a number of ways. First, writing or recording evidence and interpretations of evidence is a primary way of interacting with knowledge in different disciplines. Scientists write copiously as they conduct inquiries, recording their observations and reflecting on patterns within observations and also next steps for extending their inquiries. Mathematicians write to explain proofs and reasoning underlying their solution to a problem (Cobb, McClain, & Gravemeijer, 2001). Social scientists, similarly, write extensively but they write to place causal and temporal explanatory structures on evidence (De La Paz & Felton, 2010).

Second, writing is also a primary way in which teachers can establish the evidence that readers have gotten from a text. Whereas within discussions, the interpretations, even partial interpretations, of every student cannot be heard, writing allows each individual to express his or her interpretations.

Finally, writing is also a means whereby students can have a more concrete representation of what they have learned. Unlike the ephemeral nature of speech, a written record of the evidence gleaned from reading can be revisited, revised, and elaborated upon. Knoblauch and Brannon (1983) go so far as to state “writing makes knowledge.” (p. 466),

It is for all of these reasons (and more) that writing is interrelated so intimately with reading in the CCSS. There is evidence that validates the vital role of writing as a means for building and activating knowledge. This research has been conducted under the aegis of various

terms--writing to learn (Teng, Kasinathan, Low, Brian, & Shukri, 2012) and knowledge building through writing (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006) prominent among those.

The writing experiences that are part of the Textual Tools project (Textual Tools Study Project, 2006) have led to more developed and scientifically accurate science explanations by students when compared to their writing at the outset of the interventions, regardless of entry skills. Opportunities to write in the ways that scientists write is also an integral part of the [Name removed for blind review] project (Cervetti et al., 2012). For example, students record observations of phenomena in notebooks. They summarize the results of experiments. They also write reports, modeling the style and structure used by scientists. To support students in attending to the knowledge (as well as style and structure) in a scientific report, one of the texts in a shoreline unit—[title and reference removed for blind review]—describes the process whereby a student gathers information about sea otters and writes and revises his report. When knowledge building occurs through reading, talking, writing, and also doing, students' scientific knowledge has increased significantly. At the same time, students' vocabulary acquisition and writing fluency has benefitted (Cervetti et al., 2012).

Conclusion

The acceleration of standards in the CCSS represents a recognition that knowledge is the commodity of the digital-global age and that it is in texts that the knowledge of humankind is documented and shared. The CCSS views ELA instruction to be the context for developing the proficiencies to acquire knowledge from text, including the texts of content areas. We also want to caution that, although we have focused on disciplinary knowledge and informational text in this essay, in alignment with the focus of this special journal issue, the emphasis on disciplinary knowledge should not be taken as an attempt to diminish the importance of other kinds of

knowledge. The world knowledge that students acquire in their lives outside of school and the knowledge that students gain through the study of human condition in narrative text are important in their own rights and are also meaningful supports for students' literacy development.

To develop both the ways of acquiring knowledge in different content areas and of developing foundational bodies of knowledge that will support comprehension and knowledge building, substantially more informational texts need to be integrated into ELA instruction. But these informational texts are not simply an exercise to ensure the designated distributions of informational-narrative texts at different grade bands. The CCSS provide an opportunity for ELA teachers to be leaders in the information age.

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