



Webinar Guide 2

Common Core State Standards and Education Policy

Webinar Presented by Timothy Shanahan (February 27, 2013)
Guide by Thomas DeVere Wolsey & Elfrieda H. Hiebert

Overview

Listen and Learn

View the webinar (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lgzaU0OLpY8>) while consulting the webinar slides (<http://www.textproject.org/library/presentations/ccss-and-education-policy/>)

Reflect and Respond

Explore terms and definitions
Consider questions for discussion or written response

Analyze and Apply

Articles and resources for additional reading, writing, and discussion

Background

This presentation by Dr. Timothy Shanahan begins with a brief history of English/Language Arts (ELA) standards in the United States and presents the major content changes within the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) relative to previous standards. He then identifies how particular aspects of the educational enterprise are affected by the changes in the Common Core, specifically professional development, assessment, and remedial support. Dr. Shanahan identifies tasks that states and districts must undertake to successfully implement the CCSS/ELA standards.



Key Terms

Assessment: Assessment demands of the CCSS for many states will be administered by two organizations, both of which include computer-based tasks. Descriptions of the assessment demands are described in the third guide in this webinar series (presentation by Karen Wixson). For information specific to each assessment consortium, visit their websites:

- PARCC (<http://www.parcconline.org/>)
- Smarter Balanced (<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/>)

Bandwidth: “In its most basic definition, bandwidth describes the level of traffic and data allowed to travel and transfer between your site, users, and the Internet.” (from <http://www.executionists.com/blog/web-development/an-explanation-of-bandwidth/>)

Close reading vs. critical reading: Dr. Shanahan provided an elaborated definition of close reading (and contrasted it to critical reading) in a statement for this webinar guide (also available online at <http://www.textproject.org/library/resources/defining-close-reading/>):

Close reading by anyone’s definition (including probably mine) could exclude critical reading because such reading requires the imposition of some kind of external standards of quality or value. (In other words, true close reading allows explanation, but not evaluation). However, that means a reader would not be allowed to notice logical inconsistencies or factual errors within a text during a close reading (since logic and knowledge of the world are clearly external to the texts themselves). However, when one examines famous “close reads” such as those published by Wayne Booth (his analysis of *Turn of the Screw* is marvelous; 1961) or William Empson (1930), it is evident that they don’t reject the idea of considering value or ambiguity or inconsistency in their close readings. E. D. Hirsch (1967), when he was still somewhat entangled with the New Criticism, explicitly took the position that it was essential for the reader to understand what a text said and how it worked prior to engaging in critical analysis but, ultimately, critical analysis is part of the package, even if it comes late to the party.

The version of close reading that I like best is that espoused by Mortimer Adler and Carl Van Doren (1940). They take a similar position to Hirsch. You first have to understand what a text says and how it works, but ultimately it is legitimate to turn your attention to issues of quality and value (personal or societal) when reading. In fact, I believe that view is built into the Common Core State Standards. Look at the organization of the reading standards (Key Ideas and Details—which are clearly about summarizing what texts say; Craft and Structure—which are clearly about determining how a text works and what the author’s perspective is; and Integration of knowledge and meaning—which gets into evaluative judgments and text comparisons (Adler and Van Doren’s syntoptic reading).

There are important inconsistencies and problems in close reading. That, in part, is what the New Criticism eventually collapsed. The rules got too strenuous and prohibitive for good readers to trust in them, so the world moved on. CCSS is bringing back a great concept, and yet it is one that should not be policed too carefully or it will likely collapse again.

References

- Adler, M.J., & Van Doren, C. (1940). *How to read a book: The classic guide to intelligent reading*. Touchstone Publishers.
- Booth, W.C. (1961). *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press.
- Empson, W. (1930). *Seven types of ambiguity*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Hirsch, E.D. (1967). *Validity in interpretation*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Policy: “A guiding principle used to set direction in an organization. It can be a course of action to guide and influence decisions. It should be used as a guide to decision making under a given set of circumstances within the framework of objectives, goals and management philosophies as determined by senior management” (from <http://www.bizmanualz.com/blog/whats-the-difference-between-policies-and-procedures.html>).

Remedial programs and interventions: Those programs or approaches (e.g., push-in, pull-out, after-school, some aspects of response to intervention) designed to close a perceived gap between performance or competences and expectations for a given population of students (e.g., a grade level).

Standards: As defined by the CCSS Initiative, standards are intended to “help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful by providing clear goals for student learning” (from <http://www.corestandards.org/resources/frequently-asked-questions>).

Text-dependent questions: “Questions that can only be answered by referring back to the text” (from <http://www.achievethecore.org/ela-literacy-common-core/text-dependent-questions/>).

The Activities

Listen and Learn

The webinar is available for viewing on TextProject’s YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IgzaU0OLpY8>. Be certain that you have a copy of the slides (available in TextProject’s online library at <http://www.textproject.org/library/presentations/ccss-and-education-policy/>) on which to write notes and questions.

Purpose-Setting Questions

- ▶ What is the role of standards for teaching, learning, and assessing?
- ▶ What are the seven changes to English/Language Arts (ELA) that are identified as unique to the Common Core State Standards?

Reflect and Respond

1. Summarize Dr. Shanahan's views as to how policy decisions are affected by budgetary constraints and how professional development may need to change as a result of policy decisions relative to CCSS/ELA.
2. For the seven big changes to ELA standards identified by Dr. Shanahan, consider the ways your teacher preparation program or school approaches these changes.
 - To what degree do you think teachers are approaching these underlying changes in their classrooms? From your experiences, what evidence suggests that these changes or shifts are taking hold? What evidence is there that the changes are just “repurposed” practices (i.e., same practices but with new names) that have been in place for some time? In relation to the seven changes, identify those that appear to be the focus of “real” change and those that are either being ignored or being treated as “same-old, same-old.”
3. For teachers, the cost-estimates Dr. Shanahan mentions are staggering; however, Dr. Shanahan demonstrates how professional development costs are very difficult to calculate. However, professional development is a key to success for teachers throughout their careers as it is in any other profession.
 - Create a plan for your own professional development that incorporates your current approach to teaching and any gaps you note from the big changes or shifts of the CCSS/ELA. Be sure to note how your preparation program or school addresses these changes and your own knowledge base as a teacher.
4. Dr. Shanahan describes the importance of remediation in helping students who are not meeting current standards already, but students who are behind and need extra help will require extraordinary resources to help them bridge the gap and remain engaged.
 - How will you describe to parents how the new assessments may paint a different and perhaps discouraging picture of the learning their students are doing or the instruction that occurs at the school?
 - What steps have you observed in your teacher preparation program or school to help students remain engaged in literacy learning and simultaneously close the gap between where they are and where the expectations found in the standards tell them they should be?

Analyze and Apply

1. Review the history of the standards movement in the United States prior to the Common Core Initiative: <http://www.sonoma.edu/users/p/phelan/423/standards.html#Part2>
2. Learn more about Junior Great Books and the shared inquiry model, mentioned by Dr. Shanahan as a means of close or critical reading: <http://www.greatbooks.org/?id=1264>
3. Learn more about the six shifts in English language arts, as described by David Coleman. Many of these shifts Dr. Shanahan discusses in the Webinar (compare the six shifts to Dr. Shanahan's seven big changes): <http://www.engageny.org/resource/common-core-shifts>
4. Conduct a “close reading” of materials that describe and define close reading, including:
 - Dr. Shanahan's definition of close reading (from Key Terms earlier in this guide or online at <http://www.textproject.org/library/resources/defining-close-reading/>)
 - Dr. P. David Pearson's description from his Q&A video on close reading (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgcfNWGsbbQ>)
 - Dr. Elfrieda (Freddy) Hiebert's demonstration of the use of vocabulary for close reading with an exemplar of children's literature (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93YDCiD3wDA>)

