## A note on the Exceeding the Common Core State Standards series:

We undertook this series of three books (*Get It Done! Writing and Analyzing Informational Texts to Make Things Happen*; *Oh,* Yeah*?! Putting Argument to Work Both in School and Out*; *So, What's the Story? Teaching Narrative to Understand Ourselves, Others, and the World*) as a collaborative project designed to share our ideas on how to teach the three types of writing addressed by the Common Core State Standards in such a way that students will develop the knowledge they need to do important work both in and out of school. Each of us took the lead in writing one volume; the other two made or suggested a variety of revisions. We are able to work together because we share so much about what we think makes good writing and good teaching, so you'll see many, many similarities across the books, especially in the central principles we use to organize them. But you'll also see some differences in our approaches and in our points of emphasis. To paraphrase Mark Twain, we make this explanation for the reason that without it many readers would suppose that all three authors were trying to talk alike and not succeeding.

# Get It Done!

## Writing and Analyzing Informational Texts to Make Things Happen

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To Connie Bates
For friendship beyond all calls of duty
You fill our hearts

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## PART 2 Into the Classroom: Lesson Ideas in the Context of Inquiry–Based Units

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# CHAPTER 1

# Laying the Foundation

In this book we explore how to teach the composing—and also the reading—of informational texts. Our goal is to develop both real-world expertise in the reading and writing of these text structures, and the capacity to gain and express disciplinary understanding of the content embedded in informational text so that what students learn through the instruction we propose can help them not only in their academic pursuits but also in their daily lives.

Our great mentor is the famed researcher George Hillocks. While many well-known writing instructors seem to want to help students become highly accomplished writers, George's ultimate end, or *telos*, is more nuanced: he wants students to do intellectual and democratic work—both inside of school and outside of it—through their reading and composing. That's the reason for our title, *Get It Done!*

Though we were planning to write this book anyway, the wide-scale implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) makes it exceptionally timely, since these standards designate informational/explanatory texts as one of the three major types to be taught across grade levels and disciplines. In fact, informational/explanatory texts get some special privileging: in high school content-area classes and even in English classes, teaching informational/explanatory texts, along with argument, is supposed to predominate. The introductory CCSS documents state: "Evidence concerning the demands of college and career readiness gathered during development of the CCSS concurs with NAEP's [the National Assessment of Educational Progress] shifting emphases: standards for grades 9–12 describe writing in all three forms (narrative, argument, informational/explanatory), but, consistent with NAEP, the overwhelming focus of writing throughout high school should be on arguments and informative/explanatory texts" (retrieved from the CCSS Initiative website, 8/11/11).

➤ *CCSS connection*

The CCSS are vertically aligned and include standards for literacy in the disciplines and a focus on reading and writing informational texts in all content areas. Standards in the early grades clearly lead toward this end by emphasizing gathering evidence and structuring texts in various ways for various purposes and effects. (The notion of *rhetorical stance*, or a consideration—in one's reading and writing—of the author's "purpose, task, and audience" in achieving particular effects is emphasized throughout the CCSS.) Throughout this book, we accommodate the emphasis on comprehending and composing informational text structures by exploring two questions: Why think and write in informational/explanatory thought patterns? How can we leverage the special opportunity of the CCSS for the most vital kinds of teaching and learning?

➤ *CCSS connection*

This emphasis on informative/explanatory texts will require all teachers in all subjects to deeply understand how these structures work, how to teach them, and how to help students use them to get real work done. Let's get started!

## What Is Informative/Explanatory Writing?

Let's take a look at how the kinds of texts the CCSS identify as informative/explanatory play out in life and help people get things done. What real-world purposes are served when we teach these kinds of thought patterns?

At this writing, Jeff has just returned from a lifelong dream adventure. He first developed a desire to float down the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon when he was a twelve-year-old Boy Scout reading about the river explorations of John Wesley Powell. Forty years later, this dream came true in the most spectacular way: he spent three weeks on a private raft and kayak trip with his daughter Jasmine and fourteen other friends. Planning this exciting trip took years.

It began with a lot of emailing among the participants. The first text type seemed to be mostly *naming* and *listing*: the group members named what they thought they would need and made lists of meals, snacks, and cooking equipment; emergency and rescue gear; and so on. The items the group eventually took varied substantially from these early lists, but the lists acted as placeholders so nothing important would be forgotten.

Next, there seemed to be a lot of *summaries*: of gear organization, the trip itinerary, training regimens, and the like. The summaries ensured everyone was informed, up-to-date, and on the same page.

Since the Glen Canyon Dam was emitting the maximum flow of 26,000 cubic feet per second, Jeff began writing to friends who had kayaked down the canyon for *process*

*descriptions* of how to run particular rapids in the big water. His buddy Tim Hilmer (from the Colorado Writing Project) was a big help. At the same time, his group began exchanging directions and process descriptions for preparing and packing gear, recipes, and provisions. These "rehearsals" helped the actual trip go more smoothly.

There were also exchanges of *descriptions* of gear, meals, campsites, and rapids. Campsites, rapids, and possible hikes were *defined*, *compared*, and *classified*. Potential *problems* were discussed and *proactive solutions* proposed. There were also some *cause-and-effect* discussions. What might be the source of most health issues on a long trip? Lack of sanitary measures and failure to take care of wet feet. Solutions? Washing stations before each meal and after "groovering"[1]; daily foot checks and moisturizing.

In short, the group used a tremendous variety and amount of informational and explanatory exchanges to prepare for the trip.

They continued to do so during the trip. Most notable (and exciting) were scouting rapids and sharing various process descriptions for navigating them, with plans A, B, and C in place for each boat, as well as rescue procedures in various scenarios.

These exchanges did the work they were meant to do. The trip went off seamlessly—three weeks of spectacular scenery, major hikes requiring rope systems and rappelling, big whitewater and massive wave trains, eddy lines and swarmy washouts (did we mention the big whitewater?), all without a major flip-over, bad swim, injury, or personal or relational meltdown and with never less than a magnificent meal. Why? In large part because the group knew how to think and communicate with the appropriate thought patterns—in informational/explanatory structures.

Jim and Michael have also found themselves thinking and communicating in such structures recently.

Michael's summer was spent in a much less exciting fashion. As chair of his department, though, he had to compose in the same structures. He exchanged numerous lists of unstaffed courses with his department manager. He wrote summaries of duties to be included in the contracts of new faculty. He detailed the process faculty should use for a common assessment his department does as part of its accreditation work. While the department offices were being cleaned, one of his colleague's throw rugs went missing; he asked her to write a careful description to help him track it down. He had to decide whether to grant transfer credit for a number of incoming students, a decision that requires classification, definition, and comparison. As chair of a faculty search committee he wrote a recommendation to his Dean that

1. A slang term for using a portable toilet.

identified problems the new hires could solve and discussed the future effects the hiring would have.

Jim also found himself using various informative/explanatory thought patterns over the summer. He keeps in touch with a group of high school friends who are scattered around the country. The excuse for doing so is mostly to give each other a hard time about their fantasy baseball teams, but often these emails or text messages turn into updates about families, jobs, and relationships.

This summer found Jim's fantasy team in complete meltdown, mostly because six of his players were on the disabled list at one time. In one email exchange with his friends, he listed each player and how they were injured. Then he offered some possible trades (quickly and forcefully denied) in support of which he compared statistics and described how the players could help his friends' teams inch closer to the playoffs. Later, as Jim's team slipped further and further in the standings, he relayed process descriptions detailing how the many injuries were the cause of his team's poor showing. (They fired back that the real cause was Jim's lack of talent in choosing the right players during the draft at the beginning of the season.)

Every year, each two-week scoring period ends with the commissioner of the league, Steve, writing a brief summary of what happened during that scoring period. His summary includes any movement in the standings, and he classifies the outstanding pitchers and the outstanding hitters during that scoring period. During the offseason Jim's friends and fellow fantasy team owners swap emails about any problems and possible solutions facing the league—problems like inactive team owners or the number of players each team can keep on its roster from season to season.

These kinds of texts and exchanges are rooted in a fantasy baseball league and the work of keeping the league operating and healthy, but really they are about keeping the relationships going so that it is easier to be there to celebrate and to console when real-life events require.

## What Are the Informative/Explanatory Text Structures?

Every discipline uses these thought patterns extensively, so if we are going to help students think like real readers, writers, historians, scientists, and mathematicians, we need to teach these patterns and text structures in the context of our subject matter. And now we have the added incentive of meeting the CCSS.

➤ *Cross-curricular connections*

The logic behind narrative is primarily time or chronology. The logic behind argument is primarily evidence and reasoning about that evidence. The logic behind informative/explanatory texts is more varied. In fact the CCSS place a clear emphasis on variety: "Informational/explanatory writing includes a wide array of genres, including academic genres such as literary analyses, scientific and historical reports, summaries, and précis writing as well as forms of workplace and functional writing such as instructions, manuals, memos, reports, applications, and résumés."

➤ *CCSS connection*

This book focuses on the following informative/explanatory texts that are cited by the CCSS and, more important, are essential to disciplinary thinking and generative in that they are prerequisite or complementary to understanding and using related text types:

1. *Listing and naming*: placeholding individual elements that are important for a task or situation. (Both patterns seem implied by what the CCSS calls *naming*.)
2. *Summary/précis*: making a point using highly focused, essential key details that relate and form a pattern. (Summary is cited by the CCSS as an explanatory text structure; we see it as expressing necessary and profound disciplinary thinking upon which other kinds of work depend.)
3. *Description*: fleshed out sensory descriptions like sensoriums; reports, scientific reports, and memos; and reviews and critiques, which include judgments. (Descriptions are informational texts according to the CCSS, as are reports and reviews, which we think are primarily descriptive.)
4. *Process description*: steps in a process—recipes, directions, process analyses, and how-to texts. What the CCSS call "sequential" texts belong here if they are not narrative texts to be "lived through" but describe steps in a functional process. (Instructions, directions, and sequential texts are identified as informational/explanatory texts by the CCSS.)
5. *Definition*: extending from short encyclopedic entries to extended definitions. (Definition as specified by the CCSS involves "differentiation," which is cited as very important in disciplinary work.)
6. *Comparison–contrast*: setting two (or more) elements side by side. Rankings involve a series of comparison–contrasts. (The CCSS name comparison an informational text type that also involves "differentiation," something essential in all disciplines.)

7. *Classification*: grouping multiple elements of a specific topical universe. This involves comparing and contrasting group membership (what the CCSS calls "differentiation" is the basis of classification and is essential to disciplinary work.)
8. *Cause–effect*: explaining the relationship between an impetus or set of causes and consequences in events that have already occurred. (Anything predictive seems to us to clearly be an argument. We include this text structure here because the CCSS refer to it as an informational text type.)
9. *Problem–solution*: explaining the nature of a problem and relating the causes of the problem to the solution. (This is always predictive and seems to us to be an argument, but we include this thought pattern here to be consistent with the CCSS).

This list covers the ground suggested by the CCSS but is more than a taxonomy. Rather we see it as a hierarchy, that is, each structure is prerequisite to the next one, as it suggests what students need to know and be able to do prior to being able to use a subsequent thought pattern on the list.

For example, naming and listing key elements or details is prerequisite to putting these together in a summary. Summary is prerequisite to a description that fleshes and fills out the key details in different ways, that is, with sensory details, and by using different organizations (such as the spatial). Describing is prerequisite to defining, since defining requires precisely including and excluding the essential details of test cases—that is, understanding what is essential to a term or idea but also knowing boundaries, being able to make judgments about gray areas, and identifying examples and nonexamples. This is obviously prerequisite to comparing and contrasting different elements, as both will need to be clearly understood and defined prior to being compared. Classifying a larger set of elements depends on comparing and contrasting, even as it goes beyond this to identify the groupings and relationships of *all* elements in a topical universe. Beginning with comparison–contrast and moving through problem–solution structures seems to us to all be about various kinds of groupings of data and all depend on defining, which depends in turn on thick description. Cause–effect and problem–solution are arguments about grouping—about how ideas are related, work together, lead to each other.

Our point: students will have great difficulty summarizing if they cannot first name and list, and they won't be able to compare or classify if they cannot define. Our hierarchy therefore suggests what is prerequisite to reading and composing more

complex text types and therefore what we need to teach or at least remind students that they already know and must bring to bear to a new task.

Our discussion of discrete types is not to suggest that they are pure types, because they usually are not. Typically one text type operates as a superstructure that uses a variety of other different text types in service of the overarching text type: "Skilled writers many times use a blend . . . [of] text types to accomplish their purposes" (CCSS Appendix A, 24).

➤ *CCSS reference*

For instance, Jeff likes Seymour Simon's nature books. Simon's book *Whales* is organized by the superstructure of extended definition, since its purpose is to define whales and differentiate whales from other seas creatures. The overall structure is a series of descriptions of different features and parts of the whale's anatomy, habitat, habits, and the like that define whales and differentiate them from other creatures. However, the book starts with a comparison/contrast of whales versus fish. Page 9 is a process description of how whales breathe. Page 10 is a description of the tail. Page 19 and following is a short classification of types of whales. Page 39 is a process description of how the humpback whale feeds. And so on. Though the overall organizing structure is definition, many other structures are used in service of doing the defining.

The variety and combinations of informational/explanatory texts in real-world texts place very real challenges in front of both teachers and students but also provide many powerful rewards for those who master them.

Bottom line: even though different text types share general processes and even though they may be used in combination to achieve particular rhetorical goals, each instance of a specific thought pattern (e.g., comparison) will share very specific conventions and structures. These must be taught and mastered in order for students to be competent with these thought patterns, the text structures that embed them, and the work these can do both in the disciplines and in life.

## Leveraging the Promise of the Common Core State Standards

All three of us endorse the CCSS. We think they offer a wonderful opportunity to leverage progressive teaching and bring education in line with what we have known for a long time courtesy of cognitive science, social psychology, and educational research.

The CCSS are not unproblematic. We believe that the focus on college and career readiness is too narrow and agree that the CCSS could include a greater focus

on participatory, critical citizenry. But whether the CCSS have such a focus or not, we will explore how we can teach in ways that will prepare our students for college, career, *and* citizenship through the *structured process* of conceptual inquiry. (Please note that we are using *inquiry* as a term of art from cognitive science—as the rigorous apprenticeship into disciplinary thinking—not as student discovery learning, which is how some people conceive of it.) Through inquiry, we can promote and reward the kinds of reading and writing the CCSS foreground in ways that meet not only the college and career readiness standards but also the notion of participating as a critical citizen—of engaging in social action, service, and the like.

Another critique is that the standards were not democratically created with teachers in the lead. Agreed. However, we think the CCSS are respectful of teachers in that they give teachers latitude and decision-making power regarding the use of content and texts, as well as how to craft instruction, design curriculum, assess learning, and collaborate with colleagues. In other words, the story of the CCSS implies respect for teachers and the work of teachers. As current or former National Writing Project directors, all three of us endorse the NWP's notion that expertise about teaching resides with teachers, that teachers must strive for "conscious competence" by doing and coming to understand deeply what we teach students to do, and that teachers are the best teachers of other teachers. We think the CCSS are consistent with these views. The question is whether we, as a profession, will take on the challenge to devise curriculum for our own students and situation, selecting the most compelling content that will provide the context to engage our own students and help them meet the procedural/strategic demands of the CCSS to think with different thought patterns, to make and perform actual knowledge that can be transferred and developed over time.

To be clear, even without the CCSS we would vigorously promote teaching in the way we describe in this book. But teaching in the way we propose helps us all to meet the worthy strategic goals of the CCSS.

## Conclusion

In this book, we deal with how to teach various kinds of informational/explanatory thought patterns and text structures in the context of inquiry. In Part 1, we share a heuristic of five kinds of knowledge and five kinds of composing that are necessary to student expertise, and will help teachers explore the structures of informational

texts and highlight the importance of instructional specificity. We then follow up with how to make composing (and reading) these kinds of texts matter in the context of inquiry units. In Part 2, we explore the specific processes of teaching the reading and composing of each kind of text structure in ways that we have found compelling and useful to our own students, both in the present moment and in their foreseeable future learning, working, and living.

# CHAPTER 5

# The Process and Practical Context of Inquiry

All right. We've laid the theory-and-research groundwork for our instructional process. We think this is important, for as we've argued, effective teaching is informed, wide-awake, and theoretically situated. It's principled and therefore adaptable and transferable. Such teaching has heuristic value.

But now it's time to focus on practical applications! As teachers, we are always eager to get to the practical: we want to know what *to do* to help our students. We'll be exploring many ideas about what we can do to teach specific informational text structures in the chapters to come, but first we want to discuss what we can do to create a context that provides motivation and gives meaning to learning all of those things. That context is inquiry units built around essential questions. (For a full discussion of the power of inquiry, see Wilhelm 2007.)

➤ *The CCSS don't dictate instructional practices, leaving those up to the professional decision making of teachers.*

Once again we turn to George Hillocks. He has argued throughout his career that all forms of reading and composing are in fact forms of inquiry and are best taught and learned in contexts of inquiry. His famous meta-analysis of research on composition (1983), as well as his own research throughout his distinguished career, powerfully shows this to be the case, as has much research before and since (e.g., Newman 1995, 1996; for a current review of research, see Wilhelm 2007).

By inquiry we mean the rigorous induction into disciplinary expertise, into the ways and kinds of knowing exercised in the disciplines. Inquiry is what each discipline does to create knowledge. Inquiry, as we see it and research offers compelling proof, is the most powerful context for all teaching and learning and for all forms of reading and composing.

➤ *Inquiry nicely matches the social studies/history, science, and technical subjects literacy standards.*

One of the reasons we love being English teachers is that our discipline creates knowledge about the stuff that matters most in our lives. Teaching English, we have

the opportunity to engage students in thinking about the big and enduring questions that are likely to have motivated much of the reading and writing we've done, questions like, *To what do I owe my primary allegiance? What's the best response to injustice? To what extent is the American dream equally accessible to all?* In current parlance, these questions are called *essential questions*.

Of course, progressive teachers in all content areas have long been organizing instruction around real-world problems and issues, and we'll highlight such content-area instruction in our practice chapters.

We've been writing and teaching about building inquiry units around essential and existential questions for some time now (Smith and Wilhelm 2006; Wilhelm 2007; Wilhelm, Wilhelm, and Boas 2009; Wilhelm and Novak 2011), so we're familiar with the kinds of questions teachers typically ask about the process and how to implement it. We'll address those here through some FAQs.

## **FAQ:** What makes a good essential question?

Effective essential questions can accomodate many possible answers and provide a wide variety of opportunities to read and compose. *What is the American dream?* isn't a good question, because in our view there's consensus on the answer. *To what extent is the American dream equally accessible to all?* works much better because of the range of possible answers and how current and compelling such a question can be to students. Plus, to answer this one, students have to first come to an agreement about what constitutes the American dream and then investigate how accessible this dream is to all. (For chapter-length discussions of creating essential questions, see Wilhelm 2007; Wilhelm, Wilhelm, and Boas 2009.)

## **FAQ:** Once you have an essential question, what do you do?

Sometimes the texts or material we teach suggest the question. Sometimes the question comes first. As we plan a new unit, we consider the array of texts, particularly informational texts (creative nonfiction can be highly literary) that speak in meaningful ways to that question. For the question *to what extent is the American dream equally accessible to all?* possibilities include classic literature like *The Great Gatsby*; fiction and nonfiction that chronicles the immigrant experience, both positively and negatively; biographies of any famous person who has risen from modest (or less-than-modest circumstances); and news stories about the Occupy Wall Street movement or the

➤ *Research anchor standard 7 includes the phrase "research projects based on focused questions," terminology that recurs throughout the grade levels until the grade 9–10 and 11–12 standards, which dictate that these inquiries will be "research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question)." Teacher-generated essential questions meet the goal for research at all grades and are models for student-generated inquiries in the upper grades.*

➤ *Reading standards 7 and 9 for literature grades 11–12 and 8 and 9 for informational texts grades 11–12 explicitly specify American authors and texts.*

➤ *Reading anchor standard 9 (all levels) calls for reading multiple texts on the same theme, and reading standard 7 (all levels) asks students to read texts treating similar ideas in different media—both fit perfectly into an inquiry unit.*

income gap between rich and poor. (We could go on, which suggests that this essential question is generative.)

The next consideration is how to teach students to read and compose different text types in the context of the unit (which is the subject of this book). Here's a general protocol that we call *PPDT* to help you think about how to do so:

- *Purpose and context*. Given your unit, what thought pattern/text structure will be most important? What thought pattern(s) will be both required and rewarded in the context of learning that addresses the inquiry? How and in what situations will this thought pattern/text structure be useful and do work conceptually and procedurally in terms of the inquiry, as well as in terms of students' personal lived experience?
- *Process*. How will you engage the students in planning, practicing, drafting, presenting, and reflecting for transfer, and how will you provide the necessary opportunities for students to reach "conscious competence" for using the thought pattern both now and in the future?
- *Delivery*. How will the culminating project(s) use or integrate this thought pattern/text structure?
- *Transfer*. What purposes will the conceptual and procedural learning students achieve in this unit fulfill in future disciplinary and personal work? How will their learning help them recognize the contexts for future use of the thought pattern? How has the groundwork been laid for transfer and improvement in developing even greater expertise with the thought pattern? How will you help students name and reflect on what they have learned in ways that will foster transfer?

➤ *Reading and comparing several texts around single themes also prepares students for the longer and shorter performance tasks on the Smarter Balanced and PARCC tests.*

➤ *Writing anchor standard 4*

➤ *Writing anchor standard 5*

➤ *Writing anchor standards 2 and 4*

➤ *New PARCC and Smarter Balanced assessments require that reading and writing skills transfer to new situations.*

## **FAQ:** How do you plan a culminating composing task?

➤ *Writing anchor standards 4 and 10*

Together with your students, an important instructional move is to describe the culminating composition and the criteria for it, The description of a culminating composition should include the following elements (Wiggins and McTighe 2005), which we sum up using the acronym GRASPS:

- *Goal(s)*. What do we want to understand and be able to do? Why? How do these match the CCSS?

- *Role*. What roles will students play: themselves? a character? practitioner in a particular profession or area of expertise (mantle of the expert)? someone else?
- *Audience*. Who is the primary audience for what will be composed? How will the project/composition be shared?
- *Situation*. What circumstances surround the piece (who will read and respond to it throughout the composing process?), the writer (how much time does she have to write it? what resources can she rely on? how long does it need to be?), and the ultimate audience (when and where will they experience the piece? how might they use what they learn?)?
- *Purpose*. What work will this piece of writing do for the writer and for the audience?
- *Standards for success*. What does a strong example of this project look like? What critical standards will be met? (Tie these to the CCSS.)

➤ *CCSS writing anchor standard 4 to consider purpose, task, and audience*

The general sequences for developing instruction for each kind of composing and each kind of knowledge are recursive. You are not locked in to a specific sequence. The heuristic is flexible and should respond to your students' needs at the time.

## Composing to Plan

In this kind of composing students develop knowledge of context and purpose and begin developing procedural knowledge of substance. In other words, they come to understand the purposes and situations in which this knowledge counts and begin generating the material they need to write their own compositions. We generally make use of some of the strategies shown here:

- Brainstorm relevant background (students' past experience with an informational thought pattern, for example).
- Conduct action research. Students monitor how often this thought pattern is used during a day, either by themselves or others.
- Search and find examples of the thought pattern in newspapers, other media, or popular culture.
- Read mentor texts. This typically involves think-alouds or annotations exploring the thought pattern under consideration.
- Rank examples of the final product (from previous students or the Internet). Students begin to compose justifications for their rankings, articulate

➤ *Reading anchor standards 5 and 8*

their own critical standards, and consider what they need to learn to be able to meet these critical standards.

- Summarize purposes and contexts on anchor charts or some other classroom archive or record and consider tentative topic ideas for students' own composition. *Why are these possible topics compelling to me? How do or might they address the inquiry question? Where might I get data? What will be achieved for me and others through this kind of composition?*
- Decompose the task process, and identify what students need to learn to compose the culminating product and meet the critical standards.

➤ *Planning and practicing always interact synergistically to help the composer generate material and shape it—and to learn transferable strategies for generating and structuring thought patterns.*

## Composing to Practice

Students get and shape data by developing procedural knowledge of substance and particularly of form. We typically use some of the following strategies:

- Frontloading that is both conceptual and procedural, that activates and builds background for the task, that motivates and prepares everyone for the inquiry, and that demonstrates the necessity of the particular thought pattern/text structure.
- Practicing and naming techniques for finding, generating, and recording data (visualization, graphic organizers, drama activities, and other forms of multimodal composing).
- Working collaboratively: paired and individual composing with peer group support, revision contests, group edits/write-overs.
- Practicing and naming "crux moves" necessary to attain conceptual understanding and use the thought pattern/text structure. (This is essential in developing "conscious competence.")
- Shaping and patterning thinking through various kinds of composing.
- Practicing and naming linguistic markers (introductions, transitions, language conventions) that help shape thinking and data into this thought pattern/text structure.

➤ *Reading anchor standards 5 and 8; speaking and listening anchor standards 1 and 6; writing anchor standard 6*

➤ *Speaking and listening anchor standard 1*

We typically begin with data closer to home for students—more connected to their experience—and perhaps not as directly related to the final compositions. But we quickly move on to getting and shaping data that *is* on point. We also move from concrete to more abstract experiences (using oral activities, visualization, drama, and other multimodal forms of composing before doing straight text); from group work

➤ *The anchor standards, which are few in number and apply to all levels and in all disciplines, encourage and support practice over time in different contexts.*

to more individual work; from shorter to longer activities; from low-risk activities to high-stakes final drafting and evaluation according to critical standards. In any case it's important to give students *plenty of practice*! Put things together that go together: the more you can combine practice of form with the substance of the curriculum and current inquiry, the better. (We call this a *twofer*. We love going for twofers, threefers, and fourfers!)

## Composing to Draft

Students put all five kinds of knowledge together as they start to flesh out a draft of the text structure. This involves deep revisions of substance and form. We try to do the following:

- Continue to articulate and formalize critical standards to use as a guide for drafting. Help students get started (e.g., create good introductions and outlines, decompose the task).
- Train peer responders to apply criteria. The deep understanding of the thought pattern achieved during practice greatly enhances peer editing. It is also helpful to provide protocols for response and ask students to practice responding to model papers.

➤ *Writing anchor standard 5*

- Let students practice revision strategies like moving, deleting, changing, and adding data to the text structure to enhance coherence and global meaning.
- Remind students to consider creating multimodal exhibits to the composition or a multimodal version of it.

## Composing the Final Draft

Students polish the composition and correct surface irregularities. During this phase students:

➤ *Language standards 1, 2, and 6*

- Practice and integrate grammatical structures and vocabulary that will increase coherence of the text for the audience.
- Proofread and correct typical problems or "target areas" at the sentence level.
- Pay attention to transitions, navigational devices, and multimodal reinforcement.

## Composing for Transfer

Composing for transfer takes place throughout the unit by way of formative assessments in which students demonstrate, articulate, justify, and reflect on what they are learning. At the end of the composing process, it's important to help students reflect on what has been learned and how to carry it forward—when and how they will use what was learned about this thought pattern/text structure in the future. We use the following techniques to promote transfer:

- Conducting daily formative assessments within planning, practice, and drafting activities.
- Writing reflectively on what has been learned—what was successful, obstacles encountered, how obstacles were negotiated, what needs to be done differently next time.
- Reflecting on the process of learning, the importance of what was learned, future applications for the learning, etc., through writing, think-alouds, drama, and art.
- Imaginatively rehearsing future problem solving and living.
- Analyzing the learning process—*how* learning occurred.

Reflection prompts include:

- What did you learn that you expected? that you did not expect? conceptually? procedurally? socially?
- How did you learn it? What worked? What did not help or interfered with learning?
- What were some successes of your learning? How do you know?
- What were some obstacles and how did you experience and overcome them?
- When do you anticipate using what you have learned?
- What will you do differently the next time you engage in such a task?

➤ *This reflection is a key component of PARCC and Smarter Balanced short and long performance–based assessments.*

## **FAQ:** You guys are always going on about teaching in a meaningful context of use. Why is that so important?

The last forty-plus years of cognitive science research demonstrates that all deep learning occurs in a context which supports—actually, co-produces—that learning

and in which all understanding is deepened by being applied in real situations. (See Brown, Collins, and Duguid 1989 for an excellent review of the seminal research on this topic.) In other words, we can't really come to understand and use what we have learned unless it is learned in a meaningful situation like inquiry, which creates a situation analogous to that in which experts in the field learn. This is why we like drama so much—drama-in-education strategies create an immediate and compelling simulated context that students can immediately connect to real life.

An example of situated memory is the "doorway effect" (Oz and Roizen 2012; Schulz 2010): you walk into a room and can't remember why you came in. Here's why. If you had walked across the same room, you would not have forgotten your reason for moving—you are in the same context, and that context supports learning and memory. But go through a doorway, and your memory is hardwired to be wiped clean; it auto-purges the information you needed in the old room to be prepared for the demands of a new context. The same is true of our students: without a meaningful context for learning they lose motivation, they can't activate meaningful schema necessary to the learning, they won't see applications, and they have no reason to remember what they have learned.

## **FAQ:** How do you find time to provide all this instruction and practice and still cover the curriculum? How do you deal with the issue of time?

We do it by integrating content and process—by putting things together that go together, by integrating the teaching of conceptual and procedural knowledge that is complementary and mutually enhancing and reinforcing.

Remember the fable sequence in Chapter 3? We were able to combine fable reading and writing with conceptual learning about relationships. And we were able to do this teaching in the direct service of further conceptual and procedural learning directed toward composing arguments. We saved lots of time through twofers and threefers—teaching things together in ways that had multiple payoffs in the unit. The time we saved was spent on practice that led to deep understanding. You'll see many more examples of how to do this kind of combining in future chapters.

Many of the schools we've taught in divide genres into separate units, divorce reading from composing, and isolate grammar from writing. This kind of separation

➤ *The Common Core standards are separated into those for reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language, but integration is implied (and explicitly addressed on page 4 of the introduction under the heading "An Integrated Model of Literacy").*

doesn't make sense to us. Whenever we learn anything, solve any problem, whenever we engage in inquiry, we learn in a purposeful and meaningful situation and we use all the literature, texts, materials, and processes that pertain to that inquiry. We read a variety of literary texts, including poetry, explanatory / informative texts, arguments, multimodal texts, and popular culture texts that help us think through the content of the unit. (It's why we situated fable reading and writing within the context of a wider inquiry into relationships.)

As we work within our curriculum, we have our students practice composing using the thought patterns and text structures that the focus of the inquiry requires and rewards.

➤ *Unit ideas*

For example, a unit framed by the question *what is a good relationship?* implies that students will practice defining a good relationship and that their culminating projects will involve composing extended definitions of elements of a good relationship. The question also suggests that we should read love songs, love fables, love poetry, *Romeo and Juliet*, informational articles on relationships like those found in *Psychology Today,* along with extended definitions of various kinds of relationships (those on the Planned Parenthood website, for example). A unit framed by the question *what makes the greatest leader?* implies that students will be comparing and contrasting. *What are our civil rights and how can we best protect them?* suggests a problem–solution structure.

We no longer do genre units but include in every unit whatever genres help us with our inquiry. Likewise, we study grammatical conventions that help us write the kinds of text structures we are composing in the context of that composing. Things that go together are best taught and learned together.

If we need or are required to teach a particular text structure, we can revise our essential question to require and reward that text structure. "What makes and breaks relationships?" requires an argument of judgment. But this essential question can be revised to "What makes a good relationship?" if we want students to write an extended definition, or to "What kinds of good relationships are there?" if we are writing classifications, or "What can society do to promote good relationships?" if we need to compose an argument of policy. And so on.

As far as timing, we often design units to fit the typical nine-week grading period. This accommodates the extended practice kids need "mining" texts for ideas and generating and shaping those ideas. We typically spend seven weeks on frontloading, reading, planning, and practicing; the final two weeks are devoted to drafting and finalizing compositions and culminating projects. (This can be adjusted for other time periods; just allot enough time for kids to immerse themselves in the content and provide enough practice getting and forming the stuff to compose!)

Since kids need stuff to write about, it makes no sense to separate content units from composing and grammar. This is in line with the research on situated cognition (see Brown, Collins, and Duguid 1989) and how contexts (like inquiry) and time spent practicing (composing to plan and composing to practice) co-produce understanding. (You'll see examples of how all this works in each of the following chapters.)

This may not be how your curriculum currently works, but the process is the same even in shorter units. We meet all the standards and cover all the content of our curriculum by reorganizing our instruction into integrated inquiry units. We are less rushed, and our students learn more deeply—and do better on high-stakes tests (see Chapter 2).

Here's a final point: the CCSS offer a huge opportunity to reconceive curriculum. Since the focus of the CCSS is on procedures, and the content for leveraging these procedures is largely left up to districts and teachers, there is a tremendous opportunity to adopt inquiry instruction that integrates the kinds of knowledge that go together. We hope that all teachers will grab this opportunity with both hands. It's an unprecedented opportunity to exercise our professional expertise and decision-making power.

## **FAQ:** How do you deal with issues of grading? You recommend spending so much time practicing. What do you enter in your grade book? Parents expect to see daily grades!

We provide kids with a "PPD" every day: a *purpose* for the day's lesson that is connected to the inquiry and leads them toward and prepares them for the culminating project; the *process* we will undertake during the activity; and a *deliverable*. During every activity, we want students to produce something tangible that demonstrates effort and their current level of understanding. Sometimes this deliverable is produced in groups, but when it is, everyone has to identify his or her contribution. As we go through a unit, more and more work is individual, though students are always able to confer with their peers. The deliverables always provide a quickly accessible formative assessment that makes student learning visible and informs our teacherly thinking about what kind of practice and support is needed next.

Through the first seven weeks of a unit, the kids are planning and practicing. If they put in an honest effort and produce the deliverable, we give them ten "effort"

points each day, entered on our electronic grade sheets (which parents can view). These points are not based in any way on expertise or even growth.

Here's why: first, we think there is an ethical problem with evaluating what you have not yet taught. We don't think it is fair to apply critical standards until we have, over time, helped students meet those standards. We tell our students that we will spend seven or eight weeks being their coach, then one or two weeks being the referee—seven or eight weeks being their advocate, then one or two weeks being their judge.

Here's another reason: we like the metaphor of coaching for teaching. All three of us have been coaches of various athletic teams and other extracurricular activities in the arts or student government. Coaches don't start off day one with a high-stakes test like a competition. They spend the first sessions learning players' strengths and weaknesses, then planning how to exploit strengths and address weaknesses through weeks of . . . you guessed it: practice! Then they monitor a controlled scrimmage, then a game-conditions scrimmage—moving the players ever closer to the high-stakes test of an actual game or meet. They do whatever is necessary to help the players be successful—win or lose—in game situations.

Yet another reason: according to motivational attribution theory (see Dweck 2006) students are more likely to develop a growth mindset and willingness to work through problems over time if they attribute success to effort. The more they attribute success to talent or aptitude, the less motivated they will be and the less willing to spend time practicing and working through the challenges necessary to growth and learning. Providing grades for effort until students have had the support necessary to be successful is highly motivating and cultivates the growth mindset. In our own studies (Smith and Wilhelm 2002, 2006) we found that boys privileged competence above all else. They were willing to undertake very complex challenges like those required by the CCSS and the required assessments *if* they felt the teacher would provide the necessary assistance and support, reward effort, and provide/celebrate visible signs of their developing competence along the way.

➤ *CCSS assessments*

There's one final concern. Our time and energy are limited, and we have to decide how to best spend these valuable commodities. George Hillocks' research has convinced us that we get a lot more payoff in terms of student learning when we spend time on planning versus evaluation. He has also shown that we need to evaluate in ways *in which* and at times *when* that feedback can be used immediately—in revision and for transfer. Therefore, we prefer to base in-process effort grades throughout on formative assessments. We perform summative assessments only at the ends of units on culminating projects and according to published and negotiated critical standards.

And we always allow students to revise using our feedback. We hold students accountable but only after we have helped them master what we are assessing.

We tell our students that if they put in the effort and practice, we are confident they will develop the capacities to complete the culminating projects successfully. If students screw up and don't receive their effort points for a day, we often have them write a proposal or appeal letter (more writing!) and then allow them to make up the work. We want them to do the work, after all, and we want them to get the necessary practice, so we put the responsibility on them. We tell them we will help them in any way we can. We have some extra time to do this because we are not grading stacks of papers. We can quickly peruse formative assessments between classes and during lunch. We are pretty full-on during the day but take less work and grading home.

Remember, even though there is only one major composition assignment per quarter, our kids are writing more than they ever wrote before—and all this writing helps them develop and place hold content for their culminating compositions and practice shaping that content into a conventional thought pattern/text structure as required by the discipline. When it comes time to sit down and draft, they are practically done: they have all the stuff and plenty of practice shaping the stuff. Assignment completion on our major writing assignments, even for struggling students, is always (or very nearly) 100 percent. That was far from the case when we gave more assignments and provided less assistance to our students.

## **FAQ:** What are good culminating projects?

First off, it is vitally important that all culminating projects fit real-world purposes and are addressed to real-world audiences.

One of our culminating projects as English teachers is always a composition (individual, although our students always work with peer revisers and editors). But we believe every teacher needs to be a teacher of literacy and should include reading and composing in all units, particularly since the CCSS standards for literacy in the disciplines make the same case and require more literacy activities. We've worked with content-area teachers for many years, and we've not found a single unit in any subject, including shop or physical education, that can't be framed as inquiry and enhanced with reading and composing activities.

➤ *For example, see history/social studies, science, and technical subjects writing standard 2.*

We also like to include group multimedia projects in all our units. Most of the work on these multimedia compositions, be they digital compositions using video, hypermedia, the Internet, drama, visual arts, dance, or other arts, is done during

➤ *Writing anchor standard 6*

the last two weeks of a unit. However, we introduce the students to the kind of composing they will be doing in the first few days of the unit: we show them models and have them rank them, we articulate criteria together, and then we assist them throughout the unit to develop and practice the thinking tools they will need to develop and shape the material for their final products. This makes sense given the demands placed on students in regards to twenty-first-century literacies and the CCSS standards for composing processes, collaboration, speaking and listening, and multimodal composing.

➤ *CCSS connection*

We are moving more and more toward multimodal social action and service projects in our own teaching, since this requires that what we learned together with students be applied to the real world. For example, during our relationship unit a group of boys took a forum drama around to the district elementary schools as part of an antibullying project.

Another consideration: when students both write a piece *and* create a multimedia composition, the students get to use the thought patterns and content they have studied at least twice at the end of the unit. They get to demonstrate their learning through actual accomplishment and a resounding proof of purchase! The learning is reinforced and consolidated as they work individually on their final papers and together on multimedia compositions. And students very much want to share and view others' multimodal projects providing another authentic audience for the works.

Again, you might have to tweak our model for use in your own classroom, but this way of doing things has worked very well for us.

## **FAQ:** How do you train and use peer responders? My students are useless at helping one another improve their compositions.

We have found that students who acquire all five kinds of knowledge through the five kinds of composing develop deep understanding of not only the content of their composing but also the process and form of their writing. This gives them the skills to be a helpful peer responder and editor for one another as a real audience, someone who can give substantive advice about what to keep, move, change, add, or delete.

We have also found that our students break away from formulaic writing as a result of their deep understanding of the composing process and are better able to reflect on their composing process and self-assess the products of their writing.

Nevertheless, it's important to provide protocols for helping students respond to one another. One of our protocols is PQP—*praise*, then ask *questions* about the content and form, then offer suggestions for *polishing* and revising. Another one we like is *keep, move, change, add, delete*. We ask peer revisers to make one suggestion for something to keep, with a justification, then provide five suggestions for moving, changing, adding, or deleting something along with an explanation why this would strengthen the writing. The writer decides what advice to take but must justify in writing any advice she rejects. Structures like these (and others in this book) help students both provide substantive advice and deeply consider that advice (see Smith and Wilhelm 2007 for more on this).

We also help students practice how to be good group members, how to phrase advice, and how to set and monitor standards for good sharing. This is outside the purview of this book, but this kind of work helps students meet CCSS standards for collaboration, speaking, listening, and much else. Jeff devotes a section of *Engaging Readers and Writers with Inquiry* (2007) to these processes.

## **FAQ:** What about timing? It seems you spend the great majority of time on planning and practicing.

Absolutely right. In any domain, people develop the five kinds of knowledge primarily through composing to plan and composing to practice, so that's where we put our emphasis. Certainly, learning continues through drafting and finalizing, and deep understanding continues to be consolidated and integrated. But most learning occurs through practice, as shown in the seminal research of Ericsson (Ericsson and Lehmann 1996), the researcher who first made the case that competence requires one thousand hours, mastery three thousand hours, and expertise requires ten thousand hours of assisted and focused practice. That research also indicates that you can create new habits of mind through consistent daily practice over the course of just six or seven weeks—the amount of time we like to dedicate to planning and practicing in any unit.

Think about it this way. Jeff is a marathon Nordic skier. Last year he competed in the World Masters and U.S. Nationals ski marathon championships. He skied about two thousand kilometers during the season. Eighteen hundred of them were racked up in training, much of it work on technique. He also did core exercises, lifted weights, and stretched throughout the season. He had engaged in dry-land training and biking since the previous May. It's safe to say that by the time Jeff won his bronze medal in the U.S. Nationals, 98 percent of his time had been spent on planning and practicing.

Or consider writing this book. The three of us individually are drawing on anywhere from twenty to over thirty years of teaching experience. Jeff has been actively planning to write this particular book for twenty-three years and has been collecting materials during all that time. What you are reading is the result of years of both formal and informal research and the practical endeavor of trying things out in the classroom. Even with fifteen drafts, the actual writing was less than 2 percent of the process.

And consider any presentation you might have given. The bulk of your time was no doubt spent planning, practicing, and bringing forward (transferring) your prior knowledge and experience. That's why we emphasize planning and practicing and transferring—it's where most of the learning gets done. It's the preparation for success. And we'd rather *proactively prepare our students for success* (in fact, that's what we call teaching) than spend our time reacting to student failure and frustration. Without the planning and practice and transfer, an exceptional final product can't be achieved and used as a springboard for future success.

## **FAQ:** What about sequencing? Do you follow a particular sequence of activities?

The processes of learning and composing are highly recursive. We teach via a *structured process,* but the structure is highly flexible. We rely on what we learn from our students about their progress to make decisions about how long to spend on a particular concept or teaching move. But we always start with composing to plan and composing to practice (particularly through frontloading) and spend most of our time on planning and practicing. But during that time, students are also trying out and drafting ideas and techniques they will use in their first drafts. We use composing to transfer every day, both through dedicated formative assessments and through the actual work we are doing (which is always part of the process of practicing generating and forming material to be used in the drafting and finalizing). During the drafting and finalizing stages, we are still instructing—that is, planning and practicing. We are teaching what is appropriate at that point in the process (proofreading for grammatical correctness, for example). It doesn't make sense to do that kind of work until students have a draft they are proud of and want to share with an audience. If at any time during the drafting or finalizing stage we notice students are still struggling with one of the crux moves or concepts necessary to their culminating project, we go back to practicing.

## **FAQ:** Okay, I like what I'm hearing. Still this looks different from what students, parents, and even colleagues are used to seeing in classrooms—how do you deal with that?

Our advice is to be proactive versus reactive. In other words, let students and parents and colleagues know what you are doing before you do it, through a parent newsletter, a class website, parent nights, whatever method works for you.

Another great idea is to get at least one colleague or teaching partner to work with you. Research on teaching teams shows that pairs or small groups of teachers working together seem to be the most innovative and the best able to sustain innovation (see Arnold 1997, for example). It's like having a running buddy. We are much more likely to get up for our workout if there is someone else who shares our commitment.

➤ *CCSS assessment*

Use the CCSS as a lever. Show up front how you are working to meet the CCSS in ways that make sense according to the CCSS; prepare students for the Smarter Balanced or PARCC assessment (bringing up assessments and sharing test items often captures people's attention); and help them meet the demands of the world and the workplace.

Also use student engagement as a lever. Use the research presented here and elsewhere about human motivation, cognition, and understanding to justify your approach. Share student work at learning nights and in other ways. The quality of the work we get from our students using this process is our most convincing evidence that the process works.

Invite others to join you. If you have like-minded colleagues, or are part of a PLC, a collaborative inquiry group, or a network of teachers like that provided by the National Writing Project, form a group to explore ways of improving instruction and/or meeting the CCSS. We've typically found that you can form a coalition of the willing, with the blessing of administrators, if you don't ask that everybody in the school be on board. Many schools have been transformed by a small group of teachers modeling how to meet the common goals of the school in a more engaging way. Others are much more willing to follow once you've blazed the trail. Teacher research groups can likewise document and share success, modeling teacher professionalism in providing ever more effective instruction.