Towards public professionalism: A pentadic intervention in debate between the Common Core Standards Initiative (CCSI) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

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Towards public professionalism: A pentadic intervention in debate between the Common Core Standards Initiative (CCSI) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

Abstract
In this project, I propose an alternate rhetorical strategy for literacy educators (K-16) seeking to enter debates over common standards for "college- and career-readiness" in literacy. I argue that the NCTE's current strategy fails to invite public participation in debate, and to remedy this situation, I suggest educators employ Kenneth Burke's pentad to sponsor public inquiry into the standards. When the CCSI claims its standards will ensure that all students "demonstrate independence as readers, writers, speakers, and listeners," I suggest educators ask: in what situations do students demonstrate independence? With whom or for whom? For what purposes? Using what methods? Answers to these questions reveal the diversity of students' literacy experiences and expose the inadequacy of the Common Core standards to encompass teaching and learning. This invitational rhetorical strategy still advances the NCTE's professional values but also allows for greater public participation in debate. I call this strategy "public professionalism" and situate it in the Deweyan tradition of rhetorical action for public engagement. I conclude this project with suggestions for literacy educators seeking to enter public debates over the goals and measures of their practice.

Keywords
Language, Rhetoric and Composition, Education, Teacher Training, Education, Language and Literature

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TOWARDS PUBLIC PROFESSIONALISM:
A PENTADIC INTERVENTION IN DEBATE BETWEEN THE
COMMON CORE STANDARDS INITIATIVE (CCSI) AND THE
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH (NCTE)

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DISSERTATION

Doctor of Philosophy
in
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This dissertation would not have been completed without a lot of support. The Graduate School’s Dissertation Year Fellowship gave me the time I needed to develop my project. My committee—Tom Newkirk, Cristy Beemer, and Christina Ortmeier-Hooper in English; Paula Salvio in Education; Larry Prelli in Communication—provided helpful and insightful feedback throughout the process. This dissertation is built on six years of rich conversation with these exceptional teachers and scholars.

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Finally, I’m grateful for my family’s support and encouragement. My parents (Phil and Jan Webber) and siblings (Mark, Sylvia, and Hanneli) cheered me on when I needed it most. And, Percy, my furry pal, kept me company while writing.
In this project, I propose an alternate rhetorical strategy for literacy educators (K-16) seeking to enter debates over common standards for “college- and career-readiness” in literacy. I argue that the NCTE’s current strategy fails to invite public participation in debate, and to remedy this situation, I suggest educators employ Kenneth Burke’s pentad to sponsor public inquiry into the standards. When the CCSI claims its standards will ensure that all students “demonstrate independence as readers, writers, speakers, and listeners,” I suggest educators ask: in what situations do students demonstrate independence? With whom or for whom? For what purposes? Using what methods? Answers to these questions reveal the diversity of students’ literacy experiences and expose the inadequacy of the Common Core standards to encompass teaching and learning. This invitational rhetorical strategy still advances the NCTE’s professional values but also allows for greater public participation in debate. I call this strategy “public professionalism” and situate it in the Deweyan tradition of rhetorical action for public engagement. I conclude this project with suggestions for literacy educators seeking to enter public debates over the goals and measures of their practice.
CHAPTER I

THE CCSI-NCTE DEBATE: PROCESS, PROSPECTS, AND ISSUES

This project is a case study of current national debate over standards for k-12 public education in literacy. I analyze a 2009 exchange between the Common Core Standards Initiative (CCSI) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) concerning the goals and measures of public education in literacy: what should students be able to do with reading, writing, speaking, and listening? Who should define these goals and measures and through what kind of a process? What terms should be used to describe the goals of literacy education?

The CCSI argues that these goals and measures should be economic: students need skills to ensure international competitiveness, and standardized test scores say students aren’t getting these skills. Therefore, the CCSI’s working group—not teachers and scholars—should define the goals and measures of literacy education. To ensure that students have the skills they need to be competitive, the CCSI must be granted the authority to centralize, standardize, and align the system.

The NCTE argues that these goals and measures should be broader than those imagined by the CCSI: literacy education is best understood not as a means to an end (skills for competitiveness) but as a process of engaging students, preparing them for democratic participation, and furthering personal development. Since teachers and scholars are

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1 The CCSI represents the National Governors Association’s Center for Best Practices (NGA Center), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSO), Achieve, Inc., the ACT and the SAT, and the College Board (“Core FAQ”) while the NCTE represents teachers and scholars (k-16) of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
committed to these values, they should define the goals and measures of literacy education through their disciplinary-professional organization. In turn, the terms for these goals and measures should reflect democratic values: education is best understood as engagement with students’ purposes amidst diversity, pluralization, and change. Given this context, the NCTE argues that teachers’ and scholars’ judgment in context represents the appropriate form of expertise for public education in literacy.

These competing arguments represent a broader conflict between two discourses. The CCSI’s featured term is the scene (the competitive world defines the appropriate agency) while the NCTE’s featured term is the agent (the professional educator defines the appropriate agency). Each group’s featured term constructs a form of commonsense. For the CCSI, the scene defines the purpose of literacy education, making competitiveness the public good. Given this purpose, testing corporations and political thinks are best positioned

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2 I am drawing on Robert Asen’s definition of discourse as “bodies of rhetoric that serve as publicly articulated ways of collectively understanding and evaluating our world that propagate and enforce social norms with material consequences (12). Here I have located this project within rhetorical studies, but the issue has also been studied within political science (Stone; Rochefort and Cobb; Basso) and policy sociology (Ball; Labaree Education).

3 In this project, I use Burke’s dramatistic pentad to map the CCSI’s discourse and critique what it advances as commonsense. In Chapter 2 I will explain dramatism and the pentad more fully; for the time being, I will use the five terms of the pentad (scene, agency, agent, act, purpose) to describe the arguments, or verbal dramas, of the CCSI and the NCTE.

4 Although I do not use the term “frames” here, my analysis of scene-agency drama is similar George Lakoff’s perspective on political debate. Once an audience accepts a definition of the scene (or accepts a frame), they will struggle to acknowledge agencies that do not fit within the scene. Lakoff argues that political progressives need to reframe public policy debates that have been defined to exclude alternate perspectives. For example, calling the estate tax the “death tax” is one way that conservatives have framed debate in order to marginalize progressive policies (agencies) that aim to support equity and fairness. Other terms like “framing” include “policy metaphors” (Asen), which suggest that audiences read one situation in terms of another, and problem definition (see Stone 154; Rochefort and Cobb; Basso), wherein the problem defines the solution. My point here is that Burke’s pentad is one way of approaching a common issue.
(as agents) to define the goals and measures of teaching and learning. Whichever groups (public or private) best deliver competitiveness should define the goals and measures. Furthermore, the terms for these goals and measures should reflect market values like competitiveness rather than personal values, like student engagement, or democratic values, like citizen participation.

The NCTE’s discourse constructs a competing form of commonsense. If the agent defines the appropriate agency, the goals and measures of literacy education depend on teachers and scholars in interaction with students. The public good of literacy education is personal development, student engagement, and preparation for democratic participation. Given teachers’ centrality in defining the goals and measures of their practice, the “public” good of literacy education can be understood as the preservation of teacher judgment in context. This judgment is reflected in the featured terms: student-centeredness, engagement, meaningful use, context-sensitivity.

While these forms of commonsense arise from a specific debate over standards for literacy education, they also reflect broader conversations concerning the relationship between professional authority and democratic public participation. Which goals and measures should be public? Which experts are best positioned to deliver the public good? What constitutes an acceptable process of defining public goals and measures? What terms best reflect public values? As answers to these questions, the CCSI’s and NCTE’s arguments articulate implicit visions of public participation. The CCSI advances competition as a public value, but public perspectives on competitiveness are assumed, not invited. The NCTE gestures toward public representativeness in its argument—it is concerned with preparation for democratic participation—but the only public participation it invites is assent to its
professional authority. Here, I argue, is the crux of the problem and the motivation for this project. In both the CCSI and the NCTE, public audiences are invited to assent but not to participate in the process of defining the goals and measures of public education. In this project, I propose ways literacy educators can invite public participation rather than foreclose it. I call this approach public professionalism and ground it in the rhetorical theories of Kenneth Burke, Lloyd Bitzer, John Dewey, and Linda Flower.

I should clarify what I mean by public professionalism. First of all, it is a commitment to public participation in the process of defining the goals and measures of literacy education. That is, publics—parents, administrators, community members—need to have an opportunity to state what they believe literacy education should aim for and how it should be assessed. Since goals and measures of literacy education are always in practice, implicitly or explicitly, public participation means publics have the opportunity to assess educators' professional judgment. I regard this process as essential: without public assessments of professional judgment I see little hope for public trust in professionals (educational or otherwise). However, I do not regard public professionalism as replacing teacher judgment with public judgment.

A second aspect of public professionalism is the responsibility of educators to engage with public assessments of teacher judgment. As I explain in Chapter 6, I find parents and other publics often use commonplaces to describe their assessments of teacher judgment. By commonplaces I mean terms and phrases from the national political debates over education regarding teacher judgment, such as "she's not doing her job," "she just doesn't hold the line with students," or "she needs to get tough." My argument is that educators cannot accept these commonplaces on their face as an indication of what publics want. As I describe in
Chapter 6, what publics want is more complex than what they say. To engage with public assessments of teacher judgment, educators need to reframe these assessments. Specifically, I argue that educators need to offer public audiences the opportunity to inquire into their and their children's experiences of using and learning literacy. As I explain in Chapter 6, this opportunity can challenge public assessments, which may not be based on inquiry into concrete experience but on commonplaces about teacher failure, suspicion of public employees, and national decline. My goal in displacing commonplaces is to establish the expectation that inquiry into experience, rather than snap assessments of teacher judgment, should be the norm in school communities.

A third part of public professionalism is the creation of a local public. As a public professional, my goal is to establish a shared reality among educators and publics. We all have experiences of learning and using literacy. These experiences are rich and complex, more so than the competing commonsenses of the CCSI or the NCTE will allow. Instead of simply accepting that the national discourse of policy debate as the local discourse, I insist that educators need invite publics to build a more adequate local discourse. Specifically, as I describe in Chapters 5 and 6, this discourse is act-based: it starts with experiences of literacy use and learning in order to displace the scene- or agent-driven discourses of the CCSI and the NCTE. With a shared reality as the basis for local inquiry and deliberation, educators can work toward the overarching goal of earning trust in and authorization of professional judgments made on the public's behalf. Overall, my stance on public professionalism and public professionalism is admittedly activist. I invite public participation toward the end of reframing public assessments of teacher judgment. But, I am not interested in public authorization simply as a means of protecting teacher professionalism. Rather, I understand
public professionalism as reflecting a desire for community and collaboration. Instead of simply defending teacher judgment on the basis of research (or another exclusive form of expertise), I am seeking to frame professional judgment as also serving public values. This is my compromise between disciplinary-professional authority and democratic public participation in education. This is not exactly a Deweyan stance (although I draw on Dewey in Chapter 6), nor is it entirely a defense of the professional guild of literacy educators. Instead, I understand public professionalism as an opportunity—or even a necessity—for educators seeking to define the goals and measures of their own practice. In particular, I am interested in educators’ ability to define these goals and measures through local collaboration in their communities.

Where does my project fit into critical conversations in education, composition, and rhetoric? In education scholarship, my primary point of reference is the conflict between professionalization and deregulation as methods of school reform (see Cochran-Smith and Fries). Professionalization advocates call for teachers and scholars to define the goals and measures of teaching and learning; deregulation advocates call for outside groups—testing corporations, political think tanks, private foundations—to define these goals and measures. I place the CCSI in the tradition of deregulation discourse: although the CCSI does not expressly address teacher education and licensing, it displaces teachers’ and scholars’ control over literacy education. The way the CCSI draws on deregulation discourse is also significant. As David Labaree has noted, deregulation invites public audiences to understand education using a market logic (“No Exit”). If schools perform to standards, they will be funded; if schools do not perform to standards, publics are invited to choose another school. Consumer choice, rather than political voice within the existing arrangement, is the method
of reform. In addition to using market discourses of education, the deregulation position
draws on the discourse of science to advance its policies. These policies are not
acknowledged as deregulationist but forwarded as technical solutions to problems and ways
of getting results (see Allington; Allington and Woodside-Jiron; Stevens Patel). This
tendency of deregulationists—to employ the discourses of markets and science—has
prompted a wide range of scholarship on the need for literacy educators to become involved
in public policy debates about teaching and learning (see Mayher; Taubman; Moffett; Burns;
Fleischer; Routman; Apple; Antinarella and Wolfe; Woodside-Jiron). These scholars are
concerned that deregulation, with its appeals to economic and political commonsense, will
displace teachers and scholars from the position defining the goals and measures of teaching
and learning.

Parallel to the professionalization-deregulation debate, there is an ongoing discussion
in composition studies about the discipline’s discourse of expertise. This discussion is
concerned with the way composition scholars intervene in public struggles over who gets to
define the goals and measures of college writing. In a recent essay, Chris Gallagher argues
that composition scholars need to acknowledge the contingency of their knowledge and reject
the discourse of Science or Certainty, even when that discourse effectively enables those
outside the field to displace scholars’ professional standing (“At the Precipice of Speech”).
Several years ago, Peter Mortensen considered the same issue and made more or less the
same argument: composition scholars facing public debate should uphold their commitment
to ethical representations of teaching and learning—that is, acknowledging the contextual
nature of knowledge in composition—even when these ethical representations are often
displaced by political commonplaces that claim to uphold standards in the face of crisis and
decline. Before Mortensen, John Trimbur described how the discourse of crisis creates public anxiety even when problems with teaching and learning are not empirically demonstrable. All of these scholars are concerned with what Linda Adler-Kassner calls the trope of the jeremiad in public discussions about teaching and learning (see also Rose; Faigley; Varnum; McIntush; Gere). The problem all these scholars encounter is the tension between composition’s disciplinary discourse of expertise—which is context-sensitive and concerned with student-centered learning—and a public discourse of expertise based on the jeremiad. This project extends the efforts of Trimbur, Mortensen, Gallagher, and Adler-Kassner by drawing on the resources of Burke’s pentad to invent new ways of responding to the jeremiad of crisis and decline. Like the scholars I’ve mentioned here, I’m trying to bring the disciplinary-professional values of education and composition to public debates dominated by the discourses of Science, Markets, and Certainty. I am looking for ways to preserve teacher and scholar control over the definition of the goals and measures of literacy education. But—and here’s where rhetorical scholarship comes in—I am not concerned only with the advancement of professionalism. I am looking for a way to advance disciplinary-professional values through public participation in debate. That is, my goal is to counter the dominant discourse not through conventional professionalism—narrowing the debate—but through critical public inquiry into the policies forwarded by those who employ the dominant discourse.

In rhetoric scholarship, my major point of reference is the analysis of what Robert Asen calls “market talk,” or the dominance of the discourse of market competition across all areas of life, especially social policy and education (see also Hirschman). The dominance of a single discourse for deliberation in all areas of life has been thoroughly critiqued by
Kenneth Burke, whose democratic dialectic unsettles any view claiming to represent a “perspective of perspectives” (*Grammar* 89). Other scholars have elaborated what kinds of public spheres are imagined when a single discourse dominates deliberation about multiple areas of life. Patricia Roberts-Miller, for example, shows how a single dominant perspective for judging public life leads to a technocratic public sphere in which alternate perspectives are discounted without process and public engagement. My concern in this project is similar to those of Asen, Burke, and Roberts-Miller. I am seeking to ensure public participation from a variety of perspectives in debate over the goals and measures of literacy education.

Following Albert Hirschman, this project endorses the marginalized perspective of voice as a counterstatement to the dominant; that is, I call for public participation with emphasis on agents, acts, purposes *in addition to* the conventional emphasis on scene and agent. Finally, there is one other conversation in rhetoric (and/or policy sociology) linked to this project, and that is the discussion of expertise. Emile Benveniste is concerned with the way that technical expertise is wielded as a perspective of perspectives in public debate. Joining Burke, Hirschman, and Benveniste, I examine the potential for a public professionalism that is not only economic and technocratic. This professionalism begins (in my analysis) with Burke’s recalcitrance and moves toward an agent- and purpose-centered conception of teaching and learning. Again, as in education and composition scholarship, the major point in rhetorical scholarship is the dominance of a certain kind of discourse in defining the goals and measures of literacy education (or for any other public concern). I see the rhetoric discussions as focused on discourse and not just educational values; it is my effort in this project to bring a rhetorical perspective to bear on the discourses of expertise educators use to advance their professional authority in national debate.
These three sets of conversations—on educational professionalism, the discourse of disciplinary expertise, and perspectival diversity in public life—inform my project and motivate me to create public discourse about literacy education. I am a teacher-scholar seeking to advance my professionalism in a democratic way. The challenge of my invention efforts is to create public discourse that can be authorized as public, can break up the dominance of market-based discourse, and guide publics toward forming a more sufficient discourse for defining the goals and measures of teaching and learning literacy.

In the next chapter, Approaching the Debate: A Burkean Framework for Analysis and Invention, I lay out a framework to analyze the CCSI’s and the NCTE’s documents, critique the CCSI’s and the NCTE’s discourses, and invent perspectives alternate to those imagined by the CCSI and the NCTE. For each process, I draw on a different area of Burke’s rhetorical theory. For analysis, I use Burke’s discussion of symbolic action, the resources of ambiguity, and the dramatistic pentad (Grammar). For critique, I use Burke’s counterstatement and dialectic (Counter-statement, Philosophy, Language, Rhetoric) as well as recalcitrance (Permanence; Attitudes). For invention, I use Burke’s realist drama (Grammar; Permanence; Anderson, Prelli, Althouse). Finally, I describe how this project takes up Burke’s goal for rhetorical criticism—to open or restart democratic dialectic—in contemporary public debate over education reform.

In the third chapter, International Competition Demands Common Standards: The CCSI’s Drama, I use Burke’s pentad to analyze three examples of the CCSI’s discourse. I begin with an analysis of the central policy drama forwarded by the CCSI, in which common standards ensure international competitiveness. Second, I examine the CCSI’s criteria for standards, which state that standards must be consistent, aligned with college and work
expectations, rigorous, internationally benchmarked, research and evidence-based, and focused on 21st century skills. Finally, I dissect the student capacities sought by the CCSI. These ask that students demonstrate independence as readers, writers, speakers, and listeners; build strong content knowledge; respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline; comprehend as well as critique; privilege evidence; care about precision; craft and look for structure; and use technology strategically and capably. After mapping the CCSI’s terms, I describe how the CCSI positions its agency as the only appropriate response to the scene. Moreover, I explain how the CCSI’s choice of terms supports its political goals (asserting professional control of standards; narrowing public participation and the range of perspectives in debate).

In the fourth chapter, *Diversity Demands Teacher Judgment in Context: The NCTE’s Drama*, I use Burke’s pentad to analyze four aspects of the NCTE’s discourse: scene, agents, purpose, and agency. I begin with the scene established by the NCTE, in which literacy in students’ homes and schools is diverse and changing. Second, I analyze the agents identified by the NCTE, who include teachers, students, families, and communities in relationship. Third, I describe these agents’ purposes, which include engagement, personal development, and preparation for democratic participation. Finally, I examine the agency prescribed by the NCTE, which is pluralism based on teacher judgment in context. After mapping the NCTE’s terms, I describe how the NCTE positions its agency as the appropriate response to the scene in its policy drama. As in the previous chapter, I explain how the NCTE’s choice of terms supports its political goal (asserting educators’ professionalism as a democratic public good; restricting debate to approved professional perspectives).
In the fifth chapter, *Inviting Public Participation as a Literacy Education Professional*, I offer literacy educators a way to complement the rhetorical strategy of the NCTE. Instead of constraining the debate to professionals, I suggest educators broaden the debate by inviting critical public inquiry into the Common Core standards. Specifically, I recommend that educators use Burke’s pentad to invite public audiences to interrogate the acts of teaching and learning described in the standards (e.g., the student capacities in Chapter 3). When the CCSI claims its standards will ensure that all students “demonstrate independence as readers, writers, speakers, and listeners,” I suggest educators ask: in what situations do students demonstrate independence? With whom or for whom? For what purposes? Using what methods? Public answers to these questions reveal the diversity of students’ literacy experiences and expose the inadequacy of the Common Core to encompass teaching and learning. I argue that this critical public inquiry not only represents Burke’s democratic dialectic more fully than professionalism does but also more effectively confronts the CCSI with the realities it ignores.

In the final chapter, *Rhetorical Education for Public Professionalism*, I draw on recent scholarship to define the goals of a contemporary rhetorical education. Then, I evaluate the relationship between Burke’s democratic dialectic and these goals. I argue that a Burkean rhetorical education forms the basis of educators’ public professionalism. I describe how to prepare educators to increase public democratic engagement as well as advance their disciplines’ and professions’ values in debates over education reform. Finally, I reflect on the challenges of Burkean democracy in national education debate using three perspectives on public engagement: John Dewey’s *The Public and Its Problems*, Lloyd Bitzer’s “Rhetoric and Public Knowledge,” and Linda Flower’s *Community Literacy*. I conclude the chapter by
evaluating the potential of recent public interventions by Linda Darling-Hammond, Yong Zhao, Gerald Bracey, and Mike Rose to counter arguments like the CCSI's.
CHAPTER II

APPROACHING THE DEBATE: A BURKEAN FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS AND INVENTION

In this chapter, I present a framework for intervening in the CCSI-NCTE debate. I begin by describing aspects of Kenneth Burke’s rhetorical theory I use to analyze the CCSI’s and the NCTE’s discourses: the concepts of symbolic drama, the resources of ambiguity, and the dramatistic pentad. Next, I introduce the basis for my critique of the CCSI and the NCTE—counterstatement, democratic dialectic, and recalcitrance. These concepts underlie my overall argument as well my specific intervention in Chapter 5. Finally, I introduce the basis for my efforts at rhetorical invention. I use Burke’s realist drama to advance alternate terms for teaching and learning and, I hope, to re-open dialogue in debates over literacy education.

I should clarify: although I am a member of the NCTE and attuned to its values, this project is more than a defense of the NCTE. While I believe that the NCTE reflects my disciplinary-professional priorities more than the CCSI does, I argue—as a rhetorical critic—that both groups’ discourses seek to foreclose a democratic dialectic among public perspectives. As I will explain more fully in Chapters 3 and 4, the NCTE offers a critique of the CCSI and forwards an alternate set of terms for literacy education. The NCTE regards these terms as a corrective to what it considers the narrow terms of the CCSI. While I agree that the NCTE’s terms are broader than the CCSI’s, I argue that the NCTE relies on a policy drama like the CCSI’s, in which the agent (rather than the scene) determines the appropriate agency. Even though the NCTE acknowledges that the agent considers multiple factors to implement the appropriate agency (such as scene, act, and purpose), I maintain that the
NCTE limits these factors to functions of the agent. While I understand and sympathize with the NCTE’s tactic, I argue that the NCTE’s approach marginalizes alternate perspectives on teaching and learning, and I see this marginalization as significant for public participation in debate. A debate with little room for agents other than professional educators is not a debate that invites public participation. This framework, then, is intended for analyzing the CCSI’s and the NCTE’s discourse, critiquing them, and broadening them both. In this sense, I am offering an extension of the NCTE’s critique using Burke’s rhetorical theory. I recognize that Burke’s anarchic democracy supports the NCTE’s critique but also, ultimately, challenges and expands it.

**TERMS FOR ANALYSIS**

My approach to the CCSI-NCTE debate is to analyze what Burke calls ambiguity (*Grammar* x-xvi): “since no two things or acts or situations are exactly alike, you cannot apply the same term to both without thereby introducing a certain margin of ambiguity” (xiii). For Burke, ambiguity is inevitable, since definition puts one thing in terms of another; it is also strategic, since an audience familiar with a term can be encouraged to rely on it to define a new term. Furthermore, an audience willing to define one thing in terms of another can be guided to imagine a common ground or substance (xiii) between their own terms and those of the speaker. Burke forwards his dramatistic pentad as a method for “clarifying the resources of ambiguity” (xiii)—for highlighting what things are defined in terms of. By analyzing how a speaker creates relationships among terms, Burke argues, we can determine
how and to what the speaker attributes motive (xiv). With this knowledge, audiences can understand how a speaker invites them to imagine common ground or substance between their terms and the speaker’s. Generally speaking, Burke’s dramatism (xv) provides a method for understanding how, at the level of language, a speaker induces audiences to cooperation (Rhetoric 43).

In this project, I carry out dramatistic analysis by assigning the five terms of the pentad (act, scene, agent, agency, purpose) to the NCTE’s and the CCSI’s discourse (Grammar xv). Determining which terms are featured in the discourse can help reveal the speaker’s philosophical orientation. For Burke, a vocabulary that emphasizes agent corresponds to idealism; a vocabulary that emphasizes scene corresponds to materialism; a vocabulary that emphasizes agency corresponds to pragmatism; a vocabulary that emphasizes purpose corresponds to mysticism; and a vocabulary that emphasizes act corresponds to realism (Grammar 128-31). By mapping the CCSI’s and the NCTE’s terms, I identify transformations in the discourse—moments at which an emphasis on scene transforms to an emphasis on agency. Burke focuses on these transformations because they are a sign of ambiguity. When one thing is defined in terms of another, ambiguity arises and the term is transformed. This transformation allows audiences to imagine a common ground or substance between the thing defined and the terms; this common ground is the basis for an audience to identify with the speaker’s terms, orientation, and motives.

5 In other words, the pentad helps audiences and critics understand a speaker’s assumptions. For example, a speaker may suggest that an agent acts because of the scene. If so, that speaker’s vocabulary of motives is materialist: it reveals the assumption that action is determined by the situation. With this analysis, critics can pose counterstatements to the speaker: they can forward cases in which the agent acts because of purpose, not because of scene. The point of these counterstatements would be to reveal the limitations of the speaker’s assumptions and to re-open discussion under alternate assumptions.
The goal of pentadic analysis is to maintain a synoptic perspective on a speaker's discourse (xvi). When a speaker defines one thing in terms of something else, s/he selects and deflects aspects of the reality defined (59). The pentad highlights the aspects of reality selected and deflected by the speaker’s terms and allows critics to consider whether alternate terms and other perspectives could and/or should be featured in a statement of motives. For Burke, a speaker whose discourse features a single term of the pentad (say, agency) or single ratio (say, scene-agency) narrows the range of perspectives in discussion and debate. No single term or ratio of terms represents a “perspective of perspectives” (Grammar 89), although a speaker may rely heavily on a single term or ratio. Burke’s goal for dramatism is to open dialectic among perspectives and to re-open dialectic when discourses would seem to have become closed to alternate terms, ratios, and orientations. In this project, I employ dramatistic analysis to identify the terms featured in the CCSI-NCTE exchange. With this map of debate discourse, I identify the ambiguities exploited in each argument in order to understand how the CCSI and the NCTE invite audiences to imagine common ground or substance with them. By analyzing the vocabularies of motive forwarded in debate, I aim to reveal the perspectives privileged or marginalized in their arguments.

The larger stakes of this analysis concern the national discourse of educational reform. The CCSI’s and the NCTE’s terms for teaching and learning enact symbolic dramas featuring either the scene (the CCSI) or the agent (the NCTE). While these discourses are

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6 For example, the CCSI argues that a single definition of the scene (international competitiveness) should determine a specific form of agency (internationally-benchmarked standards). However, in this argument, the CCSI avoids discussing the roles of agents (teachers, students, administrators) or purpose (motivation, dedication, interest) in teaching and learning. The CCSI’s perspective does more than advance an argument; it advances a technocratic perspective on teaching and learning, in which agents and purpose are not considered.
presented as commonsense, I argue that neither is sufficient for a truly democratic dialectic among perspectives. Both establish a “terministic screen” (Language 45) that excludes alternate perspectives—such as act—from discussion. In this situation, Burke’s dramatistic analysis enables me to offer a corrective perspective to the commonsenses of national debate. The goal of such a corrective perspective is to open dialectic among alternate perspectives (Philosophy 444), allowing for recalcitrance, or resistance between a set of terms and the realities it deflects (Grammar 59; Counterstatement 115). This resistance and correction makes the maturation of discourse possible (Prelli, Anderson, Althouse 117). The point of a critique, then, is to make clear the sufficiency or insufficiency of a set of terms for reflecting reality. My hope as a rhetorical critic is to open the universe of discourse around literacy education to enable dialectic, recalcitrance, and maturation of discourse. An open universe of discourse supports a process of dialectic that can lead to more adequate terms for reflecting reality.

There are still larger stakes underlying the need for counterstatement, dialectic, and maturation. Burke defines democracy as “a device for institutionalizing the dialectic process” and warns that the dialectic process “absolutely must be unimpeded” (Philosophy 444). For Burke, the experience of democracy is the resistance to dominant perspectives (Counterstatement 114). Without counterstatement, dialectic, and maturation, there is no democracy. The significance of the critic’s task, Prelli, Anderson, and Althouse write, is that it enacts

a dialectic that brings under-stressed or muted perspectives into contact with dominant, over-stressed, or insular points of view. No single perspective, in its partiality, can fully come to terms with a situation’s recalcitrant materials; other perspectives will disclose recalcitrant materials not encompassed within its own terms. Each perspective thus requires revision and modification in light of recalcitrant materials disclosed through contact with the others. When
critics bring alternative perspectives into contact and disclose how meanings and "realities" revealed by the terms of one perspective remain concealed by the terms of others they are pointing out what we might call "zones of recalcitrance." When applied to hegemonic discourses, counter-statements that evoke incongruous points of view create zones of recalcitrance that, at least partially, open the universe of discourse by enabling expression of a wider range of voices that—through revising, reshaping, rephrasing, and correcting—could ultimately yield a more mature, more encompassing, and less reductive orientation toward a situation. (116-17)

My method in this project is similar to that of Prelli, Anderson, and Althouse: I substantiate and offer correctives to the CCSI’s and the NCTE’s perspectives. Neither the CCSI nor the NCTE focus on act, and I find that this term is not already surrounded by a calcified set of discourses. In the struggle to define scene, for example, the CCSI and the NCTE call on a conventionalized set of arguments that are well-worn in social policy debates. The CCSI argues that education should be understood in terms of markets; common standards will enable greater competitiveness. The NCTE argues that education should be understood in terms of democracy; pluralistic, teacher-centered judgment reflects democratic public participation. By focusing on acts of teaching and learning, my goal is to unsettle the conventionalized dramas of the CCSI and the NCTE and create a more publicly accessible drama. A drama of act is realist: it asks, what do students, teachers, administrators, and parents do? When each of these agents acts, what are their purposes? Their means? Their scenes? This inquiry tests the abstractions of the scene-agency drama (for example, "skills for international competitiveness" or "preparation for democratic participation") against concrete acts of teaching and learning. This inquiry also serves the purpose of critique: it can unsettle the CCSI’s and the NCTE’s dramas by highlighting the sufficiency or insufficiency of their terms to reflect a broad range of experiences using and learning literacy.
Like Burke, my long-term goal is not necessarily to lead to an ultimate truth but to unsettle calcified dominant perspectives (Anderson and Prelli 73). My argument here is that a specific invention is needed to open the universe of discourse in the CCSI-NCTE debate: instead of emulating the dominant scene- or agent-focused dramas, I offer alternate terms (based on act) that can be embraced by a range of publics. Inquiring into the act of “students read” to reveal a variety of scenes, agencies, and purposes makes it possible to imagine teaching and learning from a range of perspectives. It becomes possible to expand the “zones of recalcitrance” (Prelli, Anderson, Althouse 117) in which audiences question and resist the dominant discourses advanced by the CCSI and the NCTE. The act-based drama I describe here serves two functions: it can challenge the dominant discourse by demonstrating that discourse’s insufficiency for reflecting reality; and, this drama forwards correctives, more encompassing (and sufficient) terms for teaching and learning (117).

My motive in expanding the zones of recalcitrance is to work toward more encompassing and publicly accessible terms for literacy education. I argue that more public terms for teaching and learning (a full range of perspectives, not just scene and agency) can enable greater participation in a democratic dialectic among perspectives. I regard this greater participation as a public good. As I will explain further below, however, greater public participation around debate over teaching and learning is in tension with educational professionalism, which defines teacher judgment in context as the delivery of expertise (that is, the agent as inseparable from the agency). My goal in this project is to provide a specific critique of the NCTE’s response to the CCSI as well as a make a broader case for what I call public professionalism. I argue that literacy educators attracted to Burke’s dialectical vision
of democracy need to invite greater public participation in debate, even when that broader participation may undermine conventional concepts of professional authority.

**TERMS FOR INVENTION: ACT AND ACT-BASED DRAMA**

I have argued that a focus on act can substantiate or unsettle a specific orientation such as scene-agency. Because act contains all the terms of the pentad (*Grammar* 64-66), inquiring into acts of teaching and learning will reveal the other terms involved. For example, if the act is "students read," then inquiry into the act will ask for what purposes, in what settings, with what agents, and so on. Once each of these terms is elaborated, the act "students read" can reflect a full range of perspectives (*Grammar* xv). Once this full panoply of perspectives is articulated, it can also provide alternatives to the CCSI’s and the NCTE’s scene-agency dramas. Perspectives that reflect all the terms of the pentad can “frustrate” (Prelli, Anderson, and Althouse 102), “resist” (99), and “disorient” (121) the CCSI’s and the NCTE’s perspectives.

How might a realist drama gain the attention of the CCSI and the NCTE? In the debate analyzed here, neither group is willing to agree to each other’s terms. The CCSI defines the scene as a single site of competition; the NCTE defines the scene as multiple sites of collaboration among agents. Each of these discourses is calcified and fails to compel the cooperation of the other group. I turn to realist drama partly out of frustration. I recognize that opening dialogue around acts like “students read” will prompt groups like the CCSI and the NCTE to elaborate them using their preferred terms: the CCSI will elaborate the act to emphasize skills (agency) for globalized competition (scene) while the NCTE will elaborate the act to emphasize the professional educator (agent) in supporting engagement and
democratic participation (purpose) amidst diversity (scene). My point, however, is that if
both groups agree to begin dialogue around an act, their perspectives would be contrasted
with alternate, possibly more encompassing terms. Would the CCSI and the NCTE agree to
this sort of process? Here is where broader public participation around realist drama becomes
essential. I argue that realist inquiry into acts of teaching and learning ("students read" in
scenes, with agents, using agencies, for different purposes) is more publicly accessible than
the arguments from expert authority made by the CCSI and the NCTE. Currently, the CCSI
asserts that students need common standards in order to be internationally competitive; the
evidence for this statement is specialized expertise in economics. The NCTE asserts, using
disciplinary citation, that students need teacher judgment in context to support student
engagement and preparation for democratic participation. While both of these justifications
are forwarded as "public" reasons for policy, neither the CCSI nor the NCTE invites public
participation in defining the goals and measures of literacy education. Instead, they
encourage public audiences to choose pre-defined terms. "Public" understanding of or
cooperation in articulating the CCSI's and the NCTE's terms is minimized. The larger public
debate between the CCSI and NCTE becomes a closed universe of discourse in which the
only viable options acknowledged are competing scene-agency dramas. Other perspectives,
especially those based on act and purpose, are marginalized.

I believe there are a few reasons the CCSI or the NCTE might agree to open public
dialogue around acts. First, realist inquiry is publicly intelligible. Students read, write, speak,
listen. Teachers instruct, guide, correct. No exclusive expertise is needed to comprehend
these acts or to elaborate them from a variety of perspectives. These publicly intelligible acts
offer audiences a basis for critique. If the CCSI offers a perspective that emphasizes only
scene and agency, audiences have a basis for asking why there is no emphasis on agents or purpose. Likewise, if the NCTE offers a perspective that emphasizes only agents and purpose, audiences can ask why scene and act are muted. Audiences can, in other words, assess the relationship between the dominant discourse and the reality. Audiences willing to critique a set of terms may also be willing to advance and circulate an alternate set of terms. The goal of this kind of criticism would be to create zones of recalcitrance around otherwise impervious perspectives. Audiences that might defer to god-terms (Burke Religion 25) like “skills for competitiveness” or “pluralism for democracy” can maintain a panoptic perspective on discourse and demand to know how each group features the terms of the pentad. I see this sort of public participation as potentially powerful in compelling the CCSI and the NCTE to cooperate, if not with each other then at least with different public audiences. This outcome would support the greater public participation, greater dialectic, and greater democracy outlined above.

Additionally, even though these zones of recalcitrance are limited, they have the potential to expand. The NCTE’s critique at present claims expert knowledge of deliberative democracy and student engagement. Public audiences without an understanding of these concepts are not asked to participate in the defining of the NCTE’s terms; rather, they are asked to accept the professionally articulated values of the NCTE as public. My argument is that the NCTE cannot invite broader public participation around its values unless it submits to a public form of professionalism. Act-based drama is accessible. In Burkean terms, it is more “encompassing,” meaning that it contains more of the terms of the pentad. Act-based drama also represents more of a meeting point between the CCSI and the NCTE: it is minimally elaborated. It is hard for the CCSI or the NCTE (or any other group, for that
matter) to object to the reality of act: students read, write, speak, listen. Teachers instruct, guide, correct. These acts hold the potential for transcendence of the CCSI’s and the NCTE’s positions. Even as CCSI and the NCTE elaborate the acts using their preferred terms, each group may need to answer to a critical public in ways they don’t now. For the CCSI and the NCTE to agree to open dialogue around act would be dangerous because they would lose control of their terms. At the same time, though, the publicly intelligible nature of realist drama has the potential to create pressure on the CCSI and the NCTE to participate. Neither group wants to be accused of failing to represent public values. Savvy public audiences who have inquired into acts will be prepared, potentially, to point out how the CCSI and the NCTE marginalize specific perspectives on teaching and learning. My hope here is that the groups will experience counterstatement, recalcitrance, and eventually, the maturation of their discourses (see Prelli, Anderson, and Althouse 117). This is a very long game to play, and the public audiences who critique the CCSI and the NCTE may never see these groups change their terms. Still, my hope is that public audiences can create and maintain pressure on groups like the CCSI and the NCTE in a variety of forums. This sort of approach would uphold Burke’s commitment to dialectic by interrogating conventionalized communication.

CONCLUSION

The immediate goal of this framework is to enable analysis, critique, and invention in this project. In a broader sense, the goal of this project is to advance public participation to generate dialectic among perspectives on literacy education. I regard the universe of discourse in this debate (between the CCSI and the NCTE) as closed and in need of counterstatement, recalcitrance, and maturation. A matured discourse on literacy education, I
believe, can support greater democracy in public education. This democracy is threatening to the specialized expertise of the CCSI or the professionalism of the NCTE. While I recognize the value of expertise, I regard the CCSI’s and the NCTE’s expert discourses on education as conventionalized and calcified. The alternate perspective I outline—focused on act—is marginalized in the CCSI-NCTE debate. I believe that realist terms and perspectives hold potential for broadening the discourse of debate. I see my role as that of rhetorical critic offering alternate perspectives and expanding zones of recalcitrance to dominant terms and perspectives on literacy education. By unsettling conventionalized communication, I aim to prompt public audiences to demand more sufficient terms for teaching and learning. I believe these more sufficient terms will be broader than either the CCSI’s or the NCTE’s preferred terms. I regard this fuller perspective on literacy and literacy education as a public good. As I will discuss in Chapter 6, this fuller perspective may invite greater public participation and hold more potential for the maturation of debate discourse. But, it also undermines the monopoly on expertise claimed by the NCTE. In Chapter 6, I describe what I call public professionalism for educators. This professionalism is a stance that invites a wide range of perspectives on teaching and learning rather than seeking to control and narrow them. This publicity is not attractive to conventional professionalism, however, and so I argue that the NCTE can get more of what it wants—a broader set of terms for teaching and learning—more effectively through the approach I describe than through its present approach.
CHAPTER III

INTERNATIONAL COMPETITION DEMANDS COMMON STANDARDS: THE CCSI'S DRAMA

In this chapter, I examine the CCSI's discourse in detail, showing how it features the term of *scene* and excludes agents and purposes from debate over standards for literacy education. The CCSI's goal, I contend, is to advance a technocratic discourse and orientation in their proposal so that they can justify excluding their ideological opponents from the process. The CCSI constructs the central problem of literacy education as a technical one (state standards are not uniform) and demands a technical solution (establish common standards for all states); this solution requires specialized knowledge (which, coincidentally, the CCSI controls). The interest of the NCTE, in this case, is to broaden the debate from technical concerns to human and civic concerns, like personal growth or democratic participation.

As I mentioned in Chapter 2, I am interested in the CCSI because it leaves me feeling deprofessionalized as a literacy educator. How these standards will influence practice is unknown, but the CCSI relies on a narrow set of terms (scene and agency) to talk about student achievement, and the larger vision of which the CCSI is a part does not allow teachers and scholars professional roles in defining the goals and measures of teaching and learning. My immediate goal in analyzing the CCSI is to forward alternate perspectives in

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7 For example, consider the documents that serve as the basis for the CCSI. *Ready or Not*, developed by Achieve, Inc. (2004) and the *Action Agenda for Improving America’s Schools* by Achieve and the National Governors Association (2005) both displace teachers and scholars from the process of defining the goals and measures of teaching and learning.
current debates. The broader goal of this project is to help prepare literacy educators to articulate and advance their disciplinary-professional values in future national debates.

My methods for analysis, as I described in Chapter 2, are dramatistic. I am concerned, first of all, with the CCSI as a verbal enactment of symbolic drama. Using Burke’s pentad, I show how the CCSI uses its discourse to achieve its policy goals—namely, to close off debate and control the scope of the policy discussion. To determine the CCSI’s motives, I look at its discourse to understand how its members conceive of teaching and learning. As I’ll explain further below, I contend that the CCSI seeks to remake education in the image of its discourse. In that discourse, transforming education is a matter of measuring outputs (standardized test scores) by reforming standards. The problem with this conception of education, I argue, is that it neglects agent, purpose, and act—that is, people whose reasons for using literacy are shaped by interactions with each other. But the CCSI won’t state these motives openly because, as I discussed above, their technical posture allows them to avoid public debate over standards. I use Burke’s pentad to reveal motives embedded in the CCSI’s language choices. I work from the level of these choices up to their overall discourse and ideology to understand their position.

In this analysis, I’ll look at the documents released at the time of the CCSI-NCTE exchange in July 2009. These were the college- and career-readiness standards, and they consisted of six overlapping documents:

- “Core Standards for Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening”: an extensive description and justification of the Initiative. It outlines the purpose of these standards, the student practices and activities it supports, the general body of evidence
that supports these standards, and how to read the documents coming from the Initiative. (8 pages)

- “Common Core State Standards Initiative Standards-Setting Criteria”: sets out the terms of the Initiative (fewer, clearer, higher standards; aligned with college and work expectations; rigorous; 21st-century; internationally benchmarked; research and evidence-based). (2 pages)

- “Core FAQ”: discusses the process and implementation/future work, including the role of the Initiative in transforming teacher education, assessment, and funding. (5 pages)

- “Common Core State Standards Initiative Standards-Setting Considerations”: sets out and defines the terms that make up the Initiative message (fewer, clearer, higher standards; aligned with college and work expectations; rigorous; 21st-century; internationally benchmarked; research and evidence-based). Also hints at the role the Initiative will play in assessment and curriculum. (2 pages)

- “Evidence for Individual Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening Standards”: cites sources for each standard as appropriate for college and career readiness; aligned with state and other standards; and internationally benchmarked. (57 pages)

- “College and Career Readiness Standards for Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening: Draft for Review and Comment, September 21, 2009”: provides a full overview of the standards project, from reading, writing, speaking, and listening, to applications of the core standards, to illustrative texts, to works cited. (49 pages)

Since these draft standards alone represent too much material to analyze in a single chapter, I will focus on the key terms of the initiative. The Initiative claims that these “fewer, clearer,
and higher” standards will “eliminate inconsistencies among different states’ standards; be aligned with college and work expectations; be rigorous; be internationally benchmarked; be research and evidence-based; and emphasize 21st century skills.”

The Initiative forwards these standards as the means to ensure that by the time students enter college or careers, they will be able to work independently with complex texts, build strong content knowledge, respond to different contexts, comprehend and critique readings, privilege evidence, care about precision, craft and look for structure, and use technology strategically and capably. Students who can do these things, the Initiative argues, will be “college and career-ready,” “internationally competitive,” and prepared to “flourish in diverse, rapidly changing environments.”

**THE CORE FAQ**

The FAQ provides a good starting point for analyzing the initiative. In particular, the FAQ enacts a drama of scene (international competition) resolved by agency (internationally-benchmarked standards). In this discussion, I’ll refer to this resolution as a technocratic one since it avoids discussion of agents, purpose, and act. Furthermore, this resolution of drama supports the broader concept of a technocratic model of the public sphere in which debates over issues of public concern—like standards that define the goals and measures of k-12 public education—are restricted to all but those with specific technical expertise.8

The primary message of the FAQ is that these standards require no broader public authorization. The goal of education—“all children graduating from high school ready for college, work, and success in the global economy”—is assumed to be public. Anything that gets in the way of this goal must be removed. One such obstacle is the difference among

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8 For more on the contrast between technocratic and deliberative-democratic models of the public sphere, see Roberts-Miller.
states' current standards. Such independence among states “no longer makes sense” when “we need all of our students to be well prepared and ready to compete with not only their American peers, but with students from around the world.” Yet this proposal is much larger than standards; it calls for a transformation of education around these standards. “The common core state standards will enable participating states to:

- Articulate to parents, teachers, and the general public expectations for students;
- Align textbooks, digital media, and curricula to the internationally benchmarked standards;
- Ensure professional development for educators is based on identified need and best practices;
- Develop and implement an assessment system to measure student performance against the common core state standards; and
- Evaluate policy changes needed to help students and educators meet the common core state college and career readiness standards.

These transformations are not acknowledged as contested nor are the parties involved recognized as interested; rather, these transformations are described as the result of consensus. They are the product of a “growing belief among state leaders, education leaders, and business leaders that differences in state standards, in an era of increasing student mobility and global competition, no longer make sense.” These standards are the product of responding to the public good, as defined by Achieve, Inc., ACT, and the College Board.

How do these groups define the public good? As given (international competitiveness); for the CCSI, the decisions that have to be made are those of the standards themselves, and for that, evidence is the only acceptable basis for decision-making. As the FAQ states, a “validation group of independent, national experts will review the process and substance of the common core state standards delineated by the standards development group to ensure they are research and evidence based” (“FAQ”). What are the standards proposing to do, if they’re acting on already agreed-upon goals (college- and career-readiness) and applying already-established policies (evidence-based standards)? And, what are these standards
asking readers to do—get involved? Give assent to the process? Ignore it? How can the NCTE or other readers approach this document to analyze, identify, and respond to what the CCSI actually wants to do?

As I mentioned above, I suggest Burke’s dramatistic pentad for this analysis. The dominant terms here are scene and agency. The scene is one of opportunity and challenge: there are no borders; international competitiveness is intense in a flat world; state-to-state differences in standards no longer make sense. Given the scene, only one agency is appropriate: a single set of common standards that will “eliminate inconsistency” and align with college and work expectations. The ratio of terms is scene-agency, for the scene determines the agency while the other terms of the pentad (act, agent, purpose) receive less emphasis. While a number of agents are named, they are organizations and groups, and not individuals. Teachers and students are mentioned, but again, in the collective. Why do the standards in the FAQ document not emphasize act, agent, and purpose? As I discussed in Chapter 2, the CCSI enacts a drama of scene resolved by agency. The standards are not treated as the instantiation of values so much as alignment to agreed-upon sets of values. A drama restricted to the scene and agency has a narrow circumference, meaning that the standards are understood as a technical matter. If they were approached as a political matter, the drama’s circumference would need to expand: the CCSI would be concerned with agents, acts, and purpose. Discourses that acknowledge agents, acts, and purpose, however, would prevent the CCSI from positioning their effort as the alignment of standards to given values: it would reveal the CSSI as the imposition of values. For the CCSI, the scene determines the
agency; the agency determines how the agents act and for what purposes. The agency—the standards—is elevated to what Burke calls a “perspective of perspectives.”

**CCSI STANDARDS-SETTING CONSIDERATIONS**

As with the FAQ, the “Considerations” document is centered around the six central terms of the CCSI: these standards will eliminate inconsistencies among different states’ standards; be aligned with college and work expectations; be rigorous; be internationally benchmarked; be research and evidence-based; and emphasize 21st century skills. (“Considerations”). Another similarity between the “FAQ” and “Considerations” documents is that in both cases, it is unclear exactly what the writers are asking the audience to do. The documents don’t ask for approval, exactly. Here I am understanding the Considerations document as a drama performed for public audiences. What are the dispositions performed?

First, that complexity has been simplified:

Fewer, clearer, higher: One of the goals of this process was to produce a set of fewer, clearer and higher standards. It is critical that any standards document be translatable to and teachable in the classroom. As such, the standards must cover only those areas that are critical for student success. This meant making tough decisions about what to include in the standards; however, these choices were important to ensure the standards are useable by teachers.

These decisions were tough, the CCSI assures readers, but they were sound. They were not opinions but evidence-based:

Evidence: This work has made unprecedented use of evidence in deciding what to include – or not include – in the standards. Each document includes a

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9 I argue the CCSI’s maneuver is to maintain what Emile Benveniste calls the stance of antipolitics, and it is that stance that is rewarded with unelected political power to transform the system of education. For more on the antipolitics of technical expertise, see Benveniste (61-76). My concern here is with the way standards like the CCSI’s are positioned as technical expertise (rather than politically contested values) in order to circumvent public debate.
brief narrative on the choices that were made based on evidence. Rather than focusing on the opinions of experts exclusively, evidence to guide the decisions about what to include in the standards was used. This is a key difference between this process and the processes that have come before.

Though we don’t know what constitutes evidence or opinion, we are assured that this decision-making process was based on evidence. This evidence is drawn from international benchmarking studies, and the standards ensure that students will be prepared for global competition: “These standards are informed by the content, rigor and organization of standards of high-performing countries and states so that all students are prepared to succeed in a global economy and society.” After broadening the discussion of standards to the global, the Considerations document considers whether these standards can apply to all students. “In the development of these standards, the inclusion of all types of learners was a priority. Writers selected language intended to make the standards documents accessible to different learners.” As in claims about Evidence, the CCSI does not elaborate on how they determined these standards could apply equally well to all students; all we know is that no exemptions from the standards will be needed.

The next steps of the policy process are also outlined here in a discussion of assessment. It is unclear how assessments will look, only that they will be the central issue as the CCSI develops further.

While an assessment of the common core state standards is not currently being developed, these standards will ultimately be the basis for an assessment system that would include multiple measures of student performance. Once states agree on the final standards, attention will be turned to creating a high quality system of measurement that would include proper incentives for teachers to teach these standards and a variety of assessments that will reinforce teaching and learning tied to the agreed upon expectations.

Finally, the CCSI discusses the relationship of standards to curriculum. The document assures readers that curriculum can be local and varied, although standards may be common,
and "curriculum could become more consistent from state to state based on the commonality of the standards."

Standards are not curriculum. This initiative is about developing a set of standards that are common across states. The curriculum that follows will continue to be a local responsibility (or state-led, where appropriate). The curriculum could become more consistent from state to state based on the commonality of the standards; however, there are multiple ways to teach these standards, and therefore, there will be multiple approaches that could help students accomplish the goals set out in the standards.

Here the CCSI enacts a drama of scene resolved by agency. The circumference of the scene is narrow: as the Considerations document explains, only those standards that can be taught in classrooms will be detailed here. This claim defines the boundaries of literacy education so that some skills can be taught and others can be excluded. Which are which is not clear, just that there are exclusions that must be upheld for the sake of teachable and measurable standards. Also, by limiting discussion to what can be taught and measured in classrooms, the CCSI avoids having to acknowledge multiple scenes, purposes, agents, acts, and agencies for using literacy. (For example, under this definition of teachable and measurable literacy, the CCSI excludes reading, writing, speaking, and listening students may do outside of the classroom.) By working from evidence, the CCSI declares their work to be scientific and others' mere opinion. The drama is scientific, but as I've discussed above, the action is political: it shifts control of teaching and learning, a proposal that, on its own, is controversial and widely debated. For example, should the goals and measures of public school literacy education be defined by teachers and scholars or by political think tanks and testing corporations? When stated in this form, the proposition of the CCSI is certainly controversial and not merely technocratic in nature. In this document, however, public debates over school control are not acknowledged. In this way, the document enacts a drama
of easy choices: the solution is scientific and necessary; other proposals are partisan and unfounded.

What is the drama enacted here? I read it as one of scene and agency; the CCSI does not consider alternate scenes or agencies, nor does it acknowledge the diversity of agents, purposes, acts specified in its proposal. The point of this drama, as I’ve suggested, is twofold. First, the CCSI declares the Considerations scientific and technical (and not eligible for public debate). Second, the CCSI declares other perspectives on this issue inappropriate for deliberation. Meanwhile, the CCSI seeks to define what counts as knowledge and to design measures of this knowledge. In all, the drama is to suggest that there is no needed debate: the issue does not need to be any more public than it is already; better still if it were relegated to experts like the CCSI, whose evidence determines the best course of action.

**CCSI Standards-Setting Criteria**

Like the “Considerations” document discussed above, the “Criteria” document centers around the six central terms of the Initiative (fewer, clearer, higher standards; aligned with college and work expectations; rigorous; 21st-century; internationally benchmarked; research and evidence-based). However, the “Criteria” document explains to some extent what is meant by each of the terms. I’ll present each of these definitions and then analyze them, as above, to understand the symbolic drama being enacted.

The “Criteria” document begins with a Preamble explaining the goal of the CCSI. Although I have outlined this goal in my analysis above, the CCSI’s own statement reveals their effort to define what knowledge is to be recognized as legitimate and valuable. This
may come as no surprise in a standards document; what is notable here is that an effort to
define is an effort to *discount* alternate definitions of what counts as knowledge.

The Common Core State Standards define the rigorous skills and knowledge in English Language Arts and Mathematics that need to be effectively taught and learned for students to be ready to succeed academically in credit-bearing, college-entry courses and in workforce training programs...The standards intend to set forward thinking goals for student performance based in evidence about what is required for success. The standards developed will set the stage for US education not just beyond next year, but for the next decade, and they must ensure all American students are prepared for the global economic workplace.)

The goal of the CCSI, then, is to align the diversity of teaching and learning happening in high schools around a definition of the work that constitutes college and career. Stated directly: “The standards as a whole must be essential, rigorous, clear and specific, coherent, and internationally benchmarked.” What does each of these terms mean? The “Criteria” document elaborates. By essential, the CCSI means that the “standards must be reasonable in scope in defining the knowledge and skills students should have to be ready to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing, academic college courses and in workforce training programs.”

What are “workforce training programs”? These “pertain to careers that: 1) Offer competitive, livable salaries above the poverty line 2) Offer opportunities for career advancement 3) Are in a growing or sustainable industry.” What does college mean? “College refers to two- and four-year postsecondary schools,” and college work is defined as “entry-level, credit-bearing, academic college courses (e.g. English, mathematics, sciences, social sciences, humanities).” To be considered rigorous, the standards

- will include high-level cognitive demands by asking students to demonstrate deep conceptual understanding through the application of content knowledge and skills to new situations. High-level cognitive demand includes reasoning, justification, synthesis, analysis, and problem-solving.
• Clear and Specific: the standards should provide sufficient guidance and clarity so that they are teachable, learnable, and measurable. The standards will also be clear and understandable to the general public. Quality standards are precise and provide sufficient detail to convey the level of performance expected without being overly prescriptive, (the “what” not the “how”). The standards should maintain a relatively consistent level of grain size.

• Teachable and learnable: Provide sufficient guidance for the design of curricula and instructional materials. The standards must be reasonable in scope, instructionally manageable, and promote depth of understanding. The standards will not prescribe how they are taught and learned but will allow teachers flexibility to teach and students to learn in various instructionally relevant contexts.

• Measureable: Student attainment of the standards should be observable and verifiable and the standards can be used to develop broader assessment frameworks.

• Coherent: The standards should convey a unified vision of the big ideas and supporting concepts within a discipline and reflect a progression of learning that is meaningful and appropriate.

• Grade-by-grade standards: The standards will have limited repetition across the grades or grade spans to help educators align instruction to the standards.

• Internationally benchmarked: The standards will be informed by the content, rigor, and organization of standards of high-performing countries so that all students are prepared for succeeding in our global economy and society.

Although the definitions of these terms seem clear here, they only point to other work by members of the CCSI as evidence. What grounds the standards in their definitions? The claim is to be “evidence-based,” but evidence of what? As I discussed above, the authority of the CCSI rests on the assumption that high schools should prepare all students for work and/or college coursework. Furthermore, those students should be able to take coursework and training as they are without remediation or case-by-case instruction. This is what the “Criteria” document is arguing against: the notion that learning is recursive; that not all students move through grade levels as expected, or that grade-level achievement itself is not necessarily a valid gauge of learning; and that teaching and learning can’t always be
measured and managed in advance. The argument with which the CCSI is concerned here is the assertion that a technical perspective is insufficient to understand education.

In this sense, I reach a similar conclusion as above. The drama enacted by the CCSI is a technical one, focused almost entirely on scene and agency. Given the demands of college and work, high schools must prepare students for specified skills and knowledge. The drama is the problem, or the disjunction, between high school preparation and college/work expectations. The resolution is the establishment of these standards. The problem I notice, as discussed above, is the narrow circumference of the CCSI's drama: it is a scene resolved by agency, and yet the CCSI's specified agency depends on the coordination of specific agents (teachers, students, parents, administrators), acts (of teaching and learning), and purposes (for teaching and learning). Coordinating all these elements—particularly, motivating the coordination of all these elements—is not even mentioned, although it is clearly the issue at hand. As above, the CCSI is arguing against something here but without saying so directly; they are against the concept of teaching and learning as local and context-dependent, and against the concept of teachers' value as complex. All of this would be routine, except that the CCSI is presiding over a public concern, the public good of k-12 education. Given the definitions of legitimate knowledge and skills the CCSI has provided—meeting work and college expectations—the CCSI assumes public assent to these goals. Yet in this document, they are not asking for public support—they are announcing what is or is not publicly valuable. Moreover, the CCSI is not acknowledging the contested nature of their goals. In this sense, the CCSI refuses to allow its goals to be debated publicly. So long as its goals are stated technically, and so long as its drama is technocratic, public participation in discussion is certain to remain minimal. Closing discussion and dialogue on its goals is essential for the
CCSI to avoid having to broaden its circumference of terms. Right now, its terms are narrow—dealing only with what is essential for work and college—but an expansion would raise the questions posed by the NCTE above: namely, why doesn’t the CCSI talk about the diversity of agents, purposes, and acts it attempts to control?

Core Standards for Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening: Introduction

As above, I’ll outline this document and, using Burke’s pentad, analyze the symbolic drama enacted. Furthermore, I’ll try to outline the concept of literacy education that the CCSI is arguing against. There is a compromise here between what the standards specify and what is local. For example:

While this document defines the outcomes all students need to reach to be college and career ready, many important decisions about curriculum will necessarily be left to states, districts, schools, teachers, professional organizations, and parents. For example, while the standards require that students read texts of sufficient complexity, quality, and range, this document does not contain a required reading list. If states and districts choose to develop one, they should look at the Reading Exemplars provided here to get a sense of the level of complexity students must be able to handle independently when they read. Educators can also model their efforts on reading lists from around the nation and the world as long as the texts ultimately included meet the range and content standards in this document.

To examine the introductory statement as a symbolic drama yields insights similar to those outlined above. The document begins by setting the scene: “Standards today must ready students for competition and collaboration in a global, media-saturated environment...Students who meet the Core Standards will have the reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills to flourish in the diverse, rapidly changing environments of college and careers.” Likewise, the agency is specified: if students in schools meet the skills determined here, they will be able to perform in other contexts. As above, the CCSI is talking
about a transformation of terms: the scene transforms the agency (the standards), which in
turn is supposed to transform the agents, their acts, and their sense of purpose. However, in
this Introductory statement, the CCSI acknowledges agents (teachers, students, parents, etc.),
acts (creating curriculum, teaching), and alternate scenes (different communities and
schools). By acknowledging these different elements in their drama, the CCSI broadens the
circumference of their terms: whereas above the CCSI spoke almost exclusively of scene and
agency (and avoided agents, acts, and purpose), here they deal with greater complexity. By
doing this, the CCSI begins to create a different drama of educational reform: one that is
resolved in a diffuse manner as it comes into contact with the realities of local control. In this
sense, the CCSI’s advocacy of reality—in which the scene determines the agency, and the
agency transforms agents, acts, and purpose—confronts the recalcitrance of reality.

“Important decisions about curriculum,” the CCSI admits, “will necessarily be left to states,
districts, schools, teachers, professional organizations, and parents.” Still, while some
decision-making powers are local, the CCSI asserts that its definitions of college- and career-
readiness in literacy can provide a model for local work: “Educators can also model their
efforts on reading lists from around the nation and the world as long as the texts ultimately
included meet the range and content standards in this document.”

The drama enacted here features the agents of teaching and learning, but even so,
these agents are transformed by agency. What is telling is the lack of discussion of teachers’
acts or purpose. The CCSI assumes that its purpose—international competitiveness—is
sufficient to motivate the cooperation of teachers in creating curriculum under the agency of
the college- and career-readiness standards. Without featuring the terms of agent and
purpose, the CCSI ends up enacting a technocratic drama: scene transforms agency; agency
transforms acts, agents, and purpose. But this reduction of motives to a single term—teachers will do this because it’s in the standards—ignores the history of failed education reform efforts that work from the outside-in. In this case, the CCSI’s advocacy of reality becomes more clearly distinct from the reality that they grudgingly admit, which is that change requires the participation of agents. And, the realities they don’t admit—the place of teacher purpose in discussions of reform—reveal their argument to be technocratic.

Why does it matter that the drama enacted in this document is partly technocratic—that is, it reluctantly admits multiple scenes, agents, and acts into the drama? I argue that this reluctance matters because the CCSI’s advocacies of reality and the recalcitrant reality meet and are exposed. For critics, this text provides the opportunity to analyze the CCSI’s motives. Here, as I’ve outlined, its motives are to frame a scene technocratically even though that scene is not simply transformed by agency. If the reality of educational reform is not technocratic, but the CCSI’s drama is, what are we to do? I believe this question poses the challenge I posed above, which is to ask what the CCSI is arguing against. In this case, the CCSI would seem to be arguing against a concept of teaching and learning that uses a different vocabulary of motives than it does. In the CCSI, teaching is figured primarily as a matter of agency and to a lesser degree, acts and agents. But as historians and sociologists of education point out, the link between educational agency, agents, and acts is purpose, and agency alone (international competition) is not sufficient motivation for teachers to change what they do. The CCSI imagines teaching as analogous to the work of a technician; the standards update the agency or means of the technician’s work.

For discussion of this history, see Tyack and Cuban (136).
What are the stakes of the CCSI's advocacy of reality? What does it gain by figuring teaching and learning as a largely technocratic drama and not as one resolved by the interplay of purpose, act, and agent? I argue that the CCSI constructs teaching this way to fit the practice to the forms of evidence they have available. The CCSI claims to represent the skills that will make high school graduates capable of working in "innovation jobs" as well as excelling in college coursework. If k-12 education is understood instrumentally to what comes after it, other purposes for this education—like personal growth, preparation for civic life, community engagement—will be excised from discussion. When these purposes are excised, education can be understood without reference to the term of purpose, and without that, the CCSI can continue to enact its drama: education is a matter of economy, and economic research tells us what skills students must have when they graduate, and so the system must be remade in this image. Yet this image neglects the question of agents' purpose in act: why do teachers want to work with students on reading, writing, speaking, and listening? Why do students want to use literacy? The goal of the CSSI's exclusion of purpose is to prevent discussion of education in terms of students' and teachers' experience. By preventing this discussion, the CCSI constructs a technocratic model of the public sphere, in which alternate perspectives can be disqualified from dialogue. Only scene-agency vocabularies of motive are acceptable, and within that, only scenes that postulate a single, flat, globally competitive world are acceptable; other vocabularies, like those emphasizing agent and purpose (or a different definition of the scene), are not considered. By declaring discussions of purpose unnecessary, the CCSI ensures that their evidence alone is acceptable for debate. What is at stake here is the ability to define which sources of data support which
cases. By enacting a technocratic drama, the CCSI can discount alternate perspectives like the NCTE’s, which may value purpose, act, and agent.

**STUDENT PRACTICES**

This discussion might create the impression that the “capacities” defined by the CCSI as essential for college- and career-readiness are controversial. However, the “Student Practices” called for are largely conventional. For example: “Students who are college and career ready exhibit the following capacities in their reading, writing, and speaking and listening:”

1. They demonstrate independence as readers, writers, speakers, and listeners.
2. They build strong content knowledge.
3. They respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline.
4. They comprehend as well as critique.
5. They privilege evidence.
6. They care about precision.
7. They craft and look for structure.
8. They use technology strategically and capably.

Here there’s a shift in the drama enacted by the CCSI. After emphasizing scene and agency, the drama now features agents and acts. Additionally, the drama features, to some degree, a sense of multiple scenes in which agents—students or teachers—might be reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Yet as above, the interplay of agents, acts, agency, and scene is devoid of purpose. This missing term becomes more evident as the CCSI elaborates each standard.

*They demonstrate independence as readers, writers, speakers, and listeners.* Students can, without significant scaffolding or support, comprehend and evaluate complex text across a range of types and disciplines, and they can construct effective arguments and clearly convey intricate or multifaceted information. Likewise, students are independently able to discern a speaker’s
key points as well as ask questions and articulate their own ideas.

They build strong content knowledge. Students build a base of knowledge across a wide range of subject matter by engaging with works of quality and substance. They demonstrate their ability to become proficient in new areas through research and study. They read purposefully and listen attentively to gain both general knowledge and the specific in-depth expertise needed to comprehend subject matter and solve problems in different fields. They refine their knowledge and share it through substantive writing and speaking.

They respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline. Students consider their reading, writing, and speaking and listening in relation to the contextual factors of audience, task, purpose, and discipline. They appreciate nuances, such as how the composition and familiarity of the audience should affect tone. They also know that different disciplines call for different types of evidence (e.g., documentary evidence in history, experimental evidence in the natural sciences).

They comprehend as well as critique. Students are engaged and open-minded—but skeptical—readers and listeners. They work diligently to understand precisely what an author or speaker is saying, but they also question an author's or speaker's assumptions and assess the veracity of claims.

They privilege evidence. Students cite specific textual evidence when offering an oral or written interpretation of a piece of writing. They use relevant evidence when supporting their own points in writing and speaking, making their reasoning clear to the reader or listener, and they constructively evaluate others' use of evidence.

They care about precision. Students are mindful of the impact of specific words and details, and they consider what would be achieved by different choices. Students pay especially close attention when precision matters most, such as in the case of reviewing significant data, making important distinctions, or analyzing a key moment in the action of a play or novel.

They craft and look for structure. Students attend to structure when organizing their own writing and speaking as well as when seeking to understand the work of others. They understand and make use of the ways of presenting information typical of different disciplines. They observe, for example, how authors of literary works craft the structure to unfold events and depict the setting.
They use technology strategically and capably. Students employ technology thoughtfully to enhance their reading, writing, speaking, and listening. They tailor their searches online to acquire useful information efficiently, and they integrate what they learn using technology with what they learn offline. They are familiar with the strengths and limitations of various technological tools and mediums and can select and use those best suited to their communication goals.

The drama enacted here is one of agency determining acts, yet each of these scenes ignores differences among agents or purposes. What motivates students to do all these things? This is a standards document, after all, and standards can fairly be defined as an agency that can be applied across contexts to different agents. However, the student performances outlined here go beyond mere compliance; they extend to engagement. They require the engagement of purpose, and yet the only purpose stated is international competitiveness.

I argue that the student practices specified are largely conventional because they are not what the CCSI cares about most in its reforms. Instead, its larger concern is with advancing its discourse for education. With a largely technocratic discourse dominant in policy discussions, the CCSI is positioned to declare control over defining the goals and measures of teaching and learning. If purpose is a significant term for teaching and learning, students are understood as motivated to engage in meaningful uses of literacy, and teachers are understood to have broader purposes in teaching literacy. These approaches to literacy education (like those outlined by the NCTE) value teachers and students differently than the CCSI—specifically, they accept a plurality of values instead of a single standard of competitiveness. They also make large-scale definitions of legitimate or valued skills and knowledge (like the CCSI’s) nearly impossible. As I discussed above, the CCSI grants itself an advantage in debate by elevating the status of the evidence it controls while declaring other forms unacceptable.
EVIDENCE STATEMENT

In this document, the CCSI argues that the U.S. should learn from successful school systems around the world and focus schoolwork on the skills most important to future study and work. This argument is commonplace; it becomes contentious, however, in discussions of degree. To what degree should U.S. states emulate education systems and practices in other countries? How much should schoolwork be focused on essential skills? What is essential? As above, it is useful to ask what the CCSI argues against to identify the ideas it is trying to displace. Here, as above, the CCSI seems least comfortable with the possibility that k-12 education has purposes other than college- and career-readiness, such as preparation for civic participation and personal growth. As I’ve argued above, the CCSI opposes these goals because they broaden the drama from scene-agency to a more complex relationship of scene, agency, act, agent, and purpose. The “Introduction” document, like others from the CCSI, most prominently features scene-agency: given the internationally competitive scene, these standards represent the acceptable agency. The CCSI’s drama also expands here to acknowledge the realities of local control, but only to a certain extent, for discussions of purpose are still off-limits. Yet without acknowledging the place of (teacher or student) purpose in teaching and learning, the CCSI continues to assert that international competitiveness is sufficient motivation to effect transformations of teachers and students.

EVIDENCE FOR INDIVIDUAL READING, WRITING, AND SPEAKING AND LISTENING STANDARDS
The Evidence document presents 57 pages of citations, and for each standard, the CCSI groups sources into those supporting its claim to represent College Readiness, Career Readiness, International Benchmarking, and Alignment with State and other Standards. Within each of these categories are multiple links to the documents reviewed by the CCSI. After reading through the documents it becomes evident what kind of “evidence” the CCSI has considered. As I mentioned above, its working group is drawn from Achieve, Inc., the ACT, and the College Board. Most of the studies cited are self-studies done by these groups. There are other forms of evidence as well, including data from the Programme of International Student Assessment (PISA) and the standards of other countries. What is notable by its absence is research by members of the disciplinary-professional communities around literacy education (English Education, Composition, Rhetoric, literacy studies). As a drama enacted, the “Evidence Statement” posits a shift in scene and agency. For teachers and scholars, the evidence cited by the CCSI represents one source in defining educational goals and measures. For the CCSI, however, its citations are forwarded as complete evidence. In this sense, the CCSI enacts a drama that attempts to transform the definition of evidence. Who controls the definition of evidence determines whether it is drawn largely from corporate self-studies or from peer-reviewed research in the disciplines. If the scene of evidence is corporate self-study as well as international assessment data, then the CCSI controls the “evidence.” If the scene of evidence is academic research, then the NCTE controls the “evidence.” The scene of evidence determines the agency, or the means of control, and who controls the means determines the agents authorized to act. In this case, the CCSI forwards its citations as the form of evidence without acknowledging that such evidence is contested. In this sense, the CCSI enacts a technocratic drama. Without
acknowledging disagreement, the CCSI emphasizes agency (the means of control) in order to transform the acts of agents in a variety of scenes. The drama enacted is one of value-free science in which the scene, of international competition, demands the agency (internationally benchmarked standards), which in turn determines how agents act in a variety of contexts. Of course, the definitions of evidence are contested, as are the ways that agents act. As in other documents, the citations enact a drama in which purpose goes unstated, or if it is stated, it is mentioned only to affirm the assumed, shared purpose of international competitiveness.

At times, it is difficult to understand what the CCSI is arguing for because its positions are conventional (we need "common, higher standards for international competitiveness"). As above, it is useful to ask what the CCSI is arguing against. Why does the CCSI enact a technocratic drama of evidence? Why does it avoid discussions of agents, acts, and purpose? I have argued above that the CCSI excludes these vocabularies of motive in order to avoid acknowledging deep disagreement on questions of teaching and learning. By positioning the CCSI as a technical alignment of evidence with practice, other approaches to standards, like the NCTE's, can be discounted. What the CCSI argues against here, then, is the notion that literacy teachers and scholars, in practice and research, deserve to set the goals and measures of their own practice. The scene of "evidence" is shifted from local settings (assessment of student work in context) to those agents who control the agency of international test score comparisons (assessment out of context). The CCSI's motive here, as revealed by the vocabularies it uses, is to transform the scene of learning from teacher-student relationship (agent-act) to international assessment comparisons (scene-agency).

Why does this effort matter? What is the use of analyzing the vocabularies of motive employed in the "Evidence" document? This analysis is necessary, I argue, because the CCSI
presents voluminous evidence from established sources, and *these sources shift control of evidence* from teachers and scholars to members of the CCSI’s working group. In their citations, knowledge is not made by teachers and scholars but by testing companies and international assessment organizations. Based on the CCSI’s terministic screen—what they choose to emphasize and de-emphasize—their symbolic drama is relatively clear. It shifts the scene of defining goals and measures from academic to corporate research, from classroom knowledge to technical assessment apart from context. Achievement is determined through international comparison, not through comparisons with local or longitudinal self-development processes. The drama poses a problem—failure of the local—and resolves it through a change in scene and agency. Agents, acts, and purposes are assumed to follow in transformation.

**COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READINESS STANDARDS FOR READING, WRITING, AND SPEAKING AND LISTENING: DRAFT FOR REVIEW AND COMMENT, SEPTEMBER 21, 2009**

A reasonable first impression of the Standards document is, as with the Evidence document, to be overwhelmed. Here are 49 pages of densely constructed text, mostly calling for conventional goals: students should be able to read independently a range of complex texts; students should be able to write for a range of audiences, in a range of situations, for specific purposes. As I’ll explain below, however, these standards focus almost exclusively on agency and act and do not specify the varieties of scenes in which students might meet these standards; likewise, specific acts of reading and writing are not linked to agents or purpose. As a result of these choices, the Standards enact a technocratic drama in which
students meet these standards because they’re specified. What is unclear is how these standards will be applied and at what point. What instruction will students receive before being assessed? At what stages of students’ writing process will they be assessed? Instead of explaining that teachers want to create a writing task in which students will need (and want) to synthesize source material for a specific audience, the standards simply say that students need to synthesize source material. As a symbolic drama, the Standards feature acts and agency—sub-processes of reading and writing described in detail. These sub-processes are largely commonplace and uncontested. What is unknown here is the scene or context in which students are expected to act, the purposes for which students will read and write, and the different agents who will take up these practices of reading and writing.

The document does offer some clues about agents, scene, and purpose. For example, the Illustrative Readings list (6-30) cites Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* as a representative example of complex, high-quality literary text. Here, quality and complexity is synonymous with high literary tradition. The implicit argument of selecting this reading is to state that any student who is college- and career-ready needs to be able to read this text independently. All that is treated as significant is the text itself; the scene, agent, and purpose are not considered significant. The text is treated as a universal gauge of reading ability.

As a symbolic drama, the Illustrative Text features scene, agency, and act: in school, students do these sub-processes in order to read successfully. Alternate scenes—different kinds of communities, schools, classrooms—are not considered; school is assumed to be unitary. Likewise, agents are marginalized: all students need to read Austen, no matter their backgrounds or ability levels. Purpose is disregarded entirely: students read Austen because they have to. In this drama, the problem of international competitiveness is imposed by scene
and resolved by agency, yet as I’ve discussed above, agency only addresses components of competitiveness, which calls on agents and purpose. While the CCSI limits the circumference of its drama to agency, the performances described in the Standards go beyond the scene and the agent; the performances outlined here describe student engagement, which requires agent and purpose. As before, I argue that the CCSI enacts a technocratic drama in order to avoid broadening debate and discussion to include matters of politics—essentially, matters of agents acting with various purposes in a variety of scenes. Yet the claims of the standards are to challenge and engage students.

I should note that standards documents are by nature going to enact agency-driven dramas. Yet as I’ve argued above, the real prize of this reform argument does not seem to be competitiveness, which would encompass a full vocabulary of motives (scene, agency, agent, act, purpose); rather, the point is to seize upon a complex problem (international competitiveness) and to propose simple solutions (standards) that transfer control of teaching and learning from teachers and scholars to the designers of the CCSI. The standards themselves are conventional, and the drama is largely inscrutable. It is the offstage action, however, that is contentious. How will instruction be shaped by the demands of these standards? At what point in a class or year will student performances be assessed? What is the place of student motivation in these skills? These are questions the CCSI is sure to have answers for, but since these topics would broaden the circumference of their symbolic drama, the CCSI does not discuss them. Granted, in their nod to local control, the CCSI is careful to spell out the limits of standards: they are not curriculum, nor are they instruction. Yet I argue that the purpose of these standards is to discount student-centered and constructivist approaches to curriculum and instruction like the NCTE’s. With student purpose and
experience excised from the national discussion of teaching and learning, the CCSI is poised
to exert greater control over the process of defining the goals and measures of literacy
education.

CONCLUSION

In this analysis, I have used Burke’s dramatistic pentad to outline the symbolic drama
enacted in the CCSI’s documents. Furthermore, I have tried to understand the motives
underlying the CCSI’s scene-agency drama. In all of these documents, the standards are
primarily about agency and only occasionally about acts or agents. But even in those cases,
the dominant term in the orientation is always agency. If students adopt these means, they
will be internationally competitive. Yet as I’ve outlined above, the kinds of performances
sought by the CCSI go beyond compliance with agency and venture into purposeful
engagement. Indeed, it is hard to imagine students reading the Illustrative Texts successfully
without at least some degree of engagement. The CCSI’s drama resolves by agency, but
seeks purpose. In Chapters 5 and 6, I will explain further how educators can highlight this
disjunction between the CCSI’s discourse and its stated goals. Moreover, I will describe how
highlighting this disjunction can invite public inquiry into standards that are usually received
as commonplace in debate and discussion.
CHAPTER IV

DIVERSITY DEMANDS TEACHER JUDGMENT IN CONTEXT: THE NCTE’S DRAMA

The NCTE’s drama begins, as the CCSI’s does, with scene and agency. In the CCSI, the scene of international competitiveness demands the agency of common, internationally-benchmarked standards (and assessments). In the NCTE, however, the scene of diversity and change demands the agency of what I call pluralist professionalism—the distribution of judgment to teachers and scholars working in context with specific students. There is a dispute, then, between the scenes dramatized by the CCSI and the NCTE. For the CCSI, the scene is single: there are no borders; all are competing for the same supply of innovation jobs; graduates’ skills must be comparable to be competitive; only those with a competitive advantage stand a chance in the global economy. By positing a single scene, the CCSI calls for a single agency (policy): one set of standards benchmarked to those of the highest-performing nations; one standard of competitiveness; one relevant measure of success or failure. For the NCTE, however, there are multiple, diverse scenes. As the NCTE’s opening paragraph states,

The introduction of the common core standards occurs at a time of substantial change in American language and literacy. US schools are now much more diverse, with more multilingual and multicultural students per capita, than has been the case in a century. At the same time, commerce and communications have become globalized, and people can no longer assume that they will interact only with those whose language and culture match their own. These new patterns are permanent and growing, and the transformations bring with them new definitions of what it means to be educated. In addition, the rise of the Internet as the locus of so much of the developed world’s information and communications environment has introduced new forms of language, new kinds of texts, and new practices with composing and interacting. The literacy environment is one that demands innovation, creativity, and adaptability within an accelerating rate of change. In our classrooms across the nation, the
impact of these changes is already apparent. That impact, however, is not apparent in the draft of the Common Core State Standards, which, with a few exceptions, could apply as well to the schools of 1950 as to the schools of this decade and the realities the nation and the world face today. (3)

Based on this scene, the NCTE sees one reasonable agency or means—broad standards that include all aspects of literacy learning—implemented pluralistically, with educational authority distributed to individual teachers working in context. For the NCTE, however, the CCSI’s standards are too narrow.

Standards express the highest goals for student learning, and we would be disappointed if students learned only what is proposed in this draft. The National Council of Teachers of English suggests that these standards do not meet their stated criterion...For affluent students whose lives are already privileged, objectives like the ones listed in the Common Core State Standards draft might be taken for granted in their schools. Students who come from more privileged families and communities will meet these goals quickly, and so their curriculum will move beyond the low-level objectives to more sophisticated and enriched learning. For students from marginalized groups, especially ethnic minorities and students from low-income households, however, we anticipate school experience sharply narrowing to focus on only the limited skills enumerated in the document, omitting the literacy practices that motivate, engage, and inspire, as well as those that represent real power in civic life, the workplace, and the academy. Restricting their curriculum to the mundane and tedious acquisition of skills whose purpose and value—the pleasures and power of a literate life—they are never invited to see is likely to reduce education, for them, to an exercise in meeting limited literacy standards. By adhering to these standards, teachers in schools of poverty might in fact lower their expectations for their students. (3)

The drama enacted here pits scene against agency: if the scene is diverse, the standards and delivery must be diverse. The CCSI’s proposed standards and delivery are not diverse, the NCTE argues, and therefore the agency will have unintended negative consequences (mediocrity for the affluent, narrowed curriculum for the poor). The drama enacted here also reveals the relationship of agency to agents, acts, and purpose. In the CCSI’s drama, scene determines agency, and agency, in turn, determines how agents act to fulfill the given purpose. In the NCTE’s drama, the scene determines the agency, but the agency is revealed
to be multiple and contingent. Each agent, in effect, acts with purpose and employs varied agencies to address the needs of each student, community, school, district, etc. Whereas the CCSI’s drama was neatly resolved (the scene demands the agency), the NCTE’s drama is diffusely resolved, and as a form of policy, the NCTE’s argument is less advantageous for controlling and centralizing educational decision-making. This diffuse resolution of drama, however, is in keeping with the NCTE’s conception of scene:

The crafting of standards that might serve a nation as diverse as the United States is without doubt a difficult task. With the goal of “higher, clearer, and fewer” standards, the inclination could be to move toward specificity; however, such a move could result in the crafting of benchmarks rather than standards. It is the opinion of this review team that this is the case in this Common Core State Standards document. The standards in this draft are articulated as individual, testable actions rather than as authentic performances in college classrooms or workplaces. Another way of considering this is to ask, if these are the standards, how would they be different from the 12th grade benchmarks? To embrace the goal of “higher, clearer, and fewer” we are well-advised to focus first on “higher,” by which we mean more significant; failing that, then whatever is offered as “clearer and fewer” will not create the citizen needed in the 21st century. (3)

By distinguishing between benchmarks and standards, the NCTE clarifies what it understands as the educational scene. It is diverse and changing, not single and static; therefore, an appropriate agency must account for the range of agents, acts, and purposes possible in literacy education and not merely outline what is conventional or commonplace.

Not only does the NCTE’s drama resolve diffusely by multiple agents; it also invokes purpose, lending the agency a broader sense of commitment to values besides a merely technical fitting of the agency to the scene.

As we consider these standards, our most intense concern is for students in groups that often underperform on assessments. They are the people whose teachers will be forced to attend narrowly to the standards, and therefore, for the sake of their educations, the standards cannot be narrow. As drafted, the standards leave out very important dimensions of literacy learning—especially those enumerated below in a section on omissions—and if one imagines a
teacher adhering tightly to the currently proposed standards, one must imagine a teacher who is prevented from preparing students for the real world. (3)

Again, the NCTE figures the CCSI’s scene and agency as in tension. Narrow standards will have the unintended consequences of narrowing the learning of the most vulnerable students. An agency inappropriate to the scene will constrain agents inappropriately.

To account for all dimensions of literacy learning, the NCTE suggests, the standards should imagine the full range of scenes, agents, acts, and purposes involved in literacy education. To fail in this effort would be to forward an agency out of touch with the scene. Again, the reality of the scene—is the world diverse or competitive on the same grounds?—is contested.

The standards speak to “college and career” readiness. However, there are important dimensions of education beyond these two domains. Purposes for writing include self-expression; releasing the imagination; creating works of art; developing social networks; engaging in civic discourse; supporting personal and spiritual growth; reflecting on experience; communicating professionally and academically; building relationships with others, including with friends, family, and other like-minded individuals; and engaging in aesthetic experiences. Most important perhaps is education for social and civic participation. A central purpose of education—and certainly literacy education—has been to create citizens who understand and evaluate complex situations within societies and to influence the democratic process ethically, responsibly, and effectively. Much reading and writing in college centers on the public good, with students frequently asked to produce texts that address various publics, not only other academics. (For example, even in business schools, one implication of the Sarbanes-Oxley act has been to have students read and write about business practices within a larger social context.) (5-6)

The NCTE drama begins with scene and agency—a diverse setting requires diverse approaches—and broadens to emphasize agents acting in a variety of scenes for different purposes. Reading, writing, speaking, and listening are understood as human practices that do not fit neatly under the rubric of “college- and career-readiness”; likewise, they are not addressed by the neat resolution of scene-agency in the CCSI. Rather, they are addressed
through the pluralistic agency of the NCTE, an agency that is itself remade by agents acting in various contexts for various purposes.

Based on the sense of purpose outlined here, the NCTE returns to questions of agency. In its discussion of assessments, the NCTE attempts to enact an agency-centered drama by introducing disciplinary research evidence. Speaking as the representative of the scholarly fields around literacy education, the NCTE cites the research it draws on to arrive at critical judgments of the standards. By excluding this peer-reviewed research, the NCTE argues, the CCSI is likely to harm students.

We are concerned that the items in the common core may be rapidly transformed into assessments that may be reductive. Research demonstrates that narrow and high-stakes assessments reduce the scope of curriculum and decrease student engagement (Amrein & Berliner, 2002; Anagnostopoulous, 2003; Hillocks, 2002; Ketter & Pool, 2001; McNeil, 2000; Valli & Chambliss, 2007), producing unintended consequences injurious to students, especially those who have historically been underserved (Booher-Jennings, 2005; Roderick, Jacob, & Bryk, 2002; Valenzuela, 2004). Though we are confident in our ability to respond technically to the proposed standards, we would be remiss to leap into such a discussion without signaling the need for caution. We think our reservations are shared by educators, parents, and concerned citizens across the United States, and we think they should be listened to carefully (3).

Here the NCTE asserts its evidence as central to decision-making around literacy education. Its agency is the appropriate one for the scene, and its agents—professional literacy educators—are required to implement this agency. Yet the NCTE is careful not to pose its objections to the CCSI on the basis of disciplinary-professional evidence alone. In addition to research valued within the communities around literacy education, the NCTE claims to represent public concerns. Here the scene broadens again. The NCTE began its drama with a tight orientation on scene and agency: a diverse national scene requires diverse literacy education standards; the proposed standards are not diverse, therefore they must be
broadened to reflect the diversity of students, teachers, settings, and so on. With the introduction of disciplinary research evidence, the NCTE attempts to de-publicize the drama, asserting its expertise and the right of experts in literacy education to define the goals and measures of their own practice. But by invoking public concerns, the NCTE broadens the drama again to include multiple agents, scenes, acts, and purposes. The democratic representation of public concern is foregrounded, making the CCSI not merely a matter of educational standards but a matter of democratic participation.

Following this expansion of the scene, however, the NCTE narrows its scope again to note how the CCSI does not draw on disciplinary research evidence. This omission, the NCTE contends, reveals that the CCSI is uninterested in (or hostile to) expert perspectives on literacy education. The professional expertise of the NCTE—as an alternate perspective to the CCSI—becomes a public good.

We note that the document presently contains a claim that these standards are evidence-based, but we note that none of the evidence has been drawn from peer-reviewed research journals or similar sources. Rather, the evidence offered at present consists of surveys conducted by the testing companies that stand most immediately to gain from the testing of these standards. This seems to represent a conflict of interest in the development of the standards. Furthermore, much research into college literacy practices (Yancey, 2009) and workplace literacy (Beaufort, 2009) has been overlooked in this draft of the standards. We are pleased with one way of mitigating this—that those who are familiar with the relevant research and important practices were invited to contribute their insights to the standards. Additionally, we suggest removing claims that these standards are based in valid evidence, since such claims will only invite skepticism and criticism that cannot be answered. (4)

After broadening its drama to address the question of democratic representativeness, the NCTE returns to its narrow focus: do the standards represent the evidence? Can they claim to be scientifically-based? Given these concerns, the NCTE offers to open dialogue with the
CCSI, inviting it to consider the expert perspectives of literacy educators as it revises the standards.

We also hope that the common core standards can be released with an anticipated brisk calendar of revision. Realistically, even if our revisions are incorporated, it is not likely that all the shortcomings this draft, including ones we have overlooked, will be sufficiently addressed. Moreover, as literacy practices in colleges and workplaces change rapidly, there will need to be frequent updating. We hope, too, that more K–12 and college educators will be included in the framing and drafting of the standards in the future, as we believe such inclusion would contribute much knowledge and wisdom to the process. NCTE stands ready to provide names and contact information for high-quality professionals with extensive experience in standards development. (4)

Broadly speaking, the NCTE posits a diverse scene of transformations and changes, and so the agency demanded is not a single or unitary; rather, it’s diffuse with multiple agents, purposes, and acts. The NCTE argues that change in schools is toward diversity but the CCSI doesn’t reflect the “innovation, creativity, adaptability” needed. Standards are too narrow, not high; they will likely narrow school to the acquisition of skills and omit literacy practices that “motivate, engage, and inspire, as well as those that represent real power in civic life, the workplace, and the academy.” The basic mistake here, the NCTE argues, is to create standards that are benchmarks; the CCSI’s goal of standards is to articulate “individual, testable actions” rather than “authentic performances in college classrooms or workplaces.” The NCTE forwards these concerns as shared and public and frames the CCSI’s evidence base as corporate self-study. When the same groups who write the standards also write the assessments, the NCTE insists, there’s a conflict of interest. The NCTE offers a disciplinary research base to rectify the problem.

SPECIFIC REVISIONS

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Above I have noted the general outline of the NCTE’s critique of the CCSI; in the following section, I analyze the NCTE’s specific revisions to the standards. As above, the goal will be to identify the symbolic drama enacted in the NCTE’s argument. The first topic addressed by the NCTE is, fittingly, “Purposes.” The NCTE is concerned that the CCSI has narrowed the range of purposes for which students use literacy.

The standards speak to "college and career" readiness. However, there are important dimensions of education beyond these two domains. Purposes for writing include self-expression; releasing the imagination; creating works of art; developing social networks; engaging in civic discourse; supporting personal and spiritual growth; reflecting on experience; communicating professionally and academically; building relationships with others, including with friends, family, and other like-minded individuals; and engaging in aesthetic experiences. Most important perhaps is education for social and civic participation. A central purpose of education—and certainly literacy education—has been to create citizens who understand and evaluate complex situations within societies and to influence the democratic process ethically, responsibly, and effectively. Much reading and writing in college centers on the public good, with students frequently asked to produce texts that address various publics, not only other academics. (5-6)

Above I have asserted that the CCSI’s drama avoids acknowledging purpose because doing so would force the CCSI to defend itself not merely as a technical concern but as the instantiation of values. Here the NCTE asserts that the CCSI has been making value determinations in the process of making technical recommendations about the alignment of standards, teaching, and learning. In dramatistic terms, the scene-agency orientation of the CCSI confronts the reality, posited by the NCTE, of multiple agents with multiple purposes. The CCSI’s terms define literacy education as testable and measurable by the existing means (standardized tests). By having the ACT and the College Board write the standards, the CCSI proposes to remove the gap between teachers’ curricula and means of assessment on the one hand and standardized tests on the other. In the terms of the NCTE’s counterstatement, the
standards are too scene-agency oriented and must be balanced (by accounting for agents and purposes) or inviting collaborators in the process of revision.

The NCTE’s response also argues that the standards “ignore the fact that writing occurs as a process.” Had the CCSI recognized a process model of writing instruction, the NCTE suggests, its standards would have accounted for actual practices of literacy use and learning.

Effective writers have a robust repertory of skills and practices that they access and apply in response to given writing situations. They have the ability—and flexibility—to know when to concentrate on generating ideas, for example, and when to concentrate on proofreading and correctness. We understand that accounting for writing processes presents certain technical difficulties for assessment. However, if these standards are meant to guide teachers and administrators, they must address what should be taught, not simply what is easy to assess. Though it is technically possible to assess writing as a process, it is difficult on a large scale, and expensive. Although assessing process is difficult and involves investment, these standards are not being advertised as standards for assessment but standards for learning. It will be extremely costly for the nation to misrepresent the nature of composition in such standards. (6)

Here the NCTE enacts a symbolic drama of scene-agency: the scene is diverse and full of agents; the agency must reflect the writing processes of agents on the scene. The technical challenges of assessing students’ writing processes, the NCTE argues, are not sufficient reasons for ignoring the issue. To implement the appropriate agency—a student-centered, process-oriented model of writing—the CCSI needs to work with the right agents: the NCTE’s professional educators. These agents would shift the CCSI’s focus from agency (assessing writing) to agents and acts (teaching writing).

The NCTE offers a similar critique of the CCSI’s understanding of student diversity. Instead of incorporating the student-centered constructivism of professional literacy educators, the NCTE claims, the CCSI assumes a single agency will suffice for all scenes,
agents, acts and purposes. To revise their agency appropriately, the CCSI must account for differences among students, audiences, and communities. Again, the appropriate agency depends on interaction among a diverse range of agents. This interaction is represented by the NCTE's position statements and research.

The draft is silent on matters of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity. Competent communication in college and careers for the 21st century, however, cannot ignore such diversity. Explicit standards need to address a writer, speaker, and reader's consciousness of cultural difference and organized knowledge about cultural differences. Such differences are crucial not only within individual workplaces but, certainly, among workplaces that demand collaboration, especially in a globalized economy. (6)

Here, multiple scenes require multiple agencies (standards). Each context presents a unique situation of teaching and learning and not merely another setting in which to implement a single standard.

The social dimensions of learning represent a similar concern for the NCTE. As above, the NCTE's drama forwards purposes, agents, and multiple scenes that disrupt the CCSI's single scene-agency orientation of "skills."

As stated in this draft, these competencies appear to evolve in the individual without social interaction, and without social interaction as a goal. Communicative competencies, especially in writing and reading, are stated as if they occur in solitary situations. That vision of literacy ignores the importance of talk as a context for reading and writing and the role of others in individuals' developments of these skills. Furthermore, in digital environments, in the college classroom and in the contemporary white-collar workplace, collaborative reading and writing are extremely common. Once again, perhaps a focus on ease of assessing has given rise to distortions in the drafted standards for teaching and learning. (6)

Here the NCTE tries to enact an agent-agency drama by describing what "real" workplaces look like. If the CCSI were actually interested in understanding actual literacy practices, the NCTE suggests, they would incorporate teachers' and scholars' perspectives in addition to testing companies' self-studies.
The NCTE continues with a statement on 21st-century literacies. As above, the NCTE enacts an agent-agency drama in which professional educators agents deliver the appropriate agency. Although the NCTE begins with a scene-agency drama (diversity requires pluralism), the NCTE’s drama turns to focus on agents. The appropriate agency for the scene can only be implemented by the right agents—teachers and scholars who understand that literacy education is based on an interplay of scene, agency, agent, act, and purpose.

The standards' references to changing practices of literacy in this draft are vague and very limited. The demands of new literacies are real, substantive, and high-stakes, and we do not see how a set of standards produced a decade into the new millennium can ignore them to the extent this draft does. The NCTE 21st Century Curriculum and Assessment Framework, available on the Web, is one document that would offer guidance in this critical area. (7)

These comments then become even more specific as the NCTE examines and critiques specific passages from the standards. As above, the NCTE enacts an agent-agency drama but tries to broaden the concept of agency or means to include a wide vocabulary of motives (agent, purpose, act, scene, agency). In the preamble to its critique, the NCTE forwards its expertise as a matter of agency (research) but also agents (experience), purpose (commitment to the development of educators and to student learning), and acts (teaching practice).

As an organization serving literacy educators at all academic levels for nearly a century, NCTE has extensive experience in working at the school, district, state, and national levels to not merely frame standards but also to support teachers and students in the day-to-day quest to achieve them. Through these experiences, we have come to understand that the phrases used to describe outcome goals have far-reaching consequences, not only for educators and students, but for communities and our society generally. Thus, we focus our review efforts on being as precise as possible in sketching the implications of text/phrase choices found in benchmarks and standards in the current draft. Our comments are grounded in NCTE policy, the peer-reviewed research base that underlies those policies, and the real-world experience of schools, districts, and states who have encountered unforeseen frustrations when the standards-based reforms they pursued didn’t square with rapid changes in the practice of literacy and the conditions of schooling. (7)
As above, the NCTE enacts an agent-agency drama: teachers and scholars represent the means of implementing research and policy. Purpose is minimized here in order to present educators' expertise as technical, research-based, and scientific.

CONCLUSION

The NCTE's drama begins with scene and agency: an appropriate agency for literacy education must account for the diversity of agents, purposes, scenes, and acts involved. The agency becomes pluralist professionalism, and the point is to distribute judgment across the range of teachers instead of making as many judgments as possible now in the CCSI. But, by enacting a diffuse drama (diverse scenes resolved by a pluralist agency via multiple agents), the NCTE exploits a set of ambiguities different from those emphasized in the CCSI's argument. That is, the NCTE doesn't invite the identification of audiences for whom certainty, simplicity, and instrumentality appeal strongly. In the next chapter, I will describe an alternate approach for the NCTE and other literacy educators seeking to respond to the CCSI. I argue that educators, by sponsoring public inquiry into acts of teaching and learning, can form a critique of the CCSI. Moreover, I argue that this inquiry and critique can be more effective for opening dialogue on standards than contesting the purpose or scene of education as the NCTE does.
As of this writing (March 2012), the debate has ended. Shortly after the NCTE made its response public in September 2009, the CCSI’s college- and career-readiness standards were approved and sent on to the working group, which wrote k-12 grade level standards and released them in June 2010. In one sense, the CCSI-NCTE debate is a done deal. In another sense, however, the debate remains unresolved. Shortly after the NCTE responded in September 2009, the CCSI presented an overview of public feedback. The CCSI did not mention the NCTE’s critique, but it referred to public feedback, which included that of NCTE members. This summary of public feedback from the CCSI served as a public messaging strategy for the CCSI. The NCTE, meanwhile, turned from addressing the CCSI to creating a public message of its own by releasing an open letter to NCTE members (September 2009). The purpose of this letter was to inform members of the role the NCTE had played in the development of the standards.

The CCSI’s summary of public feedback (Fall 2009) opens with a statement of purpose.

The point of the state-led effort to create common academic standards is simple: improving teaching and learning to ensure that high school graduates in every part of the nation have the knowledge and skills they need for college or a career. The process is designed to produce standards that are research and evidence-based as well as internationally benchmarked. If students meet these new rigorous and clear standards, they will have better choices in their lives and the nation will be more competitive in today’s global economy. State leaders clearly understand that these common academic expectations are the essential building block to significantly improve education for all students. They are also listening carefully to a variety of audiences to make sure the new Common Core State Standards provide the excellence and clarity that educators and...
students require. To this end, a draft of the common core standards was available for public comment between September 21 and October 21, 2009. ("Summary")

The CCSI presented highlights from the feedback, including the following.

The Importance of a Standards-Based System: Many respondents said that while it is important to get the standards right, standards are only one part of a complex system. Respondents said it is important to build an assessment system that measures fairly what is important and gives teachers timely information. They spoke to the necessity of having a robust curriculum that is aligned to the standards and also allows individuals to maximize their potential beyond meeting the standards. Respondents stressed the need for professional development designed to better equip the existing teaching force and for teacher preparation programs that seek out the best and brightest candidates, prepare them well, and support them as they start teaching.

Some respondents took the opportunity to share grievances and concerns not specific to either content area and beyond the scope of the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Most of these are isolated comments on a unique topic.

Anti-Standard or Anti-Testing Sentiments: There was no statement directly against the Common Core State Standards, but a few respondents expressed the idea that a focus on standards comes at the expense of developing individual students. It was also stated that standards do little to improve education but rather drain money away from the classroom and feed bureaucracy.

Standards Writing Process: Some respondents questioned the process used to draft the standards. There were comments about whether the process could have been more transparent and complaints that too few classroom teachers were involved in the writing process. There were also concerns about possible conflicts of interest because some team members are associated with the testing industry.

A number of respondents, most often classroom teachers, found the standards to be exemplary. As one teacher states, “These standards are excellent! They are relevant, realistic, and rigorous. The format of the document itself is user-friendly; this is great work! Thank you!” The majority of respondents reacted favorably to the standards but want adjustments.

“Less is More” versus “More is Better”: Respondents conceptually embrace the idea of “fewer, clearer, higher” standards. However, most also suggest the standards be expanded in one or more areas. Respondents suggested dozens of topics that could also be added or expanded, but rarely is it suggested that a
topic be eliminated or minimized. Among the topics suggested to be added to the standards are 1) civic readiness; 2) applied learning; 3) awareness of author strategies; 4) collaboration; 5) oral and written language development specific to disciplines; 6) the way that gender, race, class, and culture shape our textual interpretations; 7) ability to navigate in a digital world; 8) differences in formal and information rules among forms of genres; 9) topics and research questions; 10) flexible writing processes; 11) reading for pleasure; 12) viewing skills; and 13) vocabulary development.

There is a predictable relationship between a respondent’s expertise and his or her suggestions. Writing teachers want more specificity about the process, types, and purposes of writing woven into the Common Core State Standards; librarians tend to be more sensitive to the opportunities and demands created by the online environment; and reading teachers offer much more detailed and specific standards related to teaching reading.

Make the Study of Literature and a Defined Reading List Explicit: A number of respondents cited two connected additions to the standards: the importance of having a literature standard and the importance of including a defined reading list. Respondents believe that it is through literature that students come to understand the possibilities of language, gain access to the major genres, find models of style and syntax for their own writing, and develop historical and philosophical knowledge. Some respondents believe that defining great books that all students should read is a core piece of this teaching. They express a concern that the emphasis of the draft standards is reductive and too focused on the workplace. (“Summary”)

For the CCSI, this document represented an opportunity to claim public support for the standards. Although the CCSI does present a variety of perspectives—both adulatory and critical—it frames most of the feedback as affirming and the critiques as largely misplaced or irrelevant.

The NCTE’s public message, in its open letter to members (September 2009) takes a different stance. Instead of claiming that public perspectives affirmed the NCTE’s position, President Kylene Beers tries to call NCTE members to action without actually revealing her disagreement with the standards. For example,

On Friday, September 18, NCTE—and other organizations—received an embargoed copy of the revised standards. Today, on September 21, this document is available for public review and comment. I now invite you, after
reading this version, to participate in a conversation on the NCTE Ning site\textsuperscript{11} by responding to this question: How will these standards help or inhibit my best work as a literacy educator? We will leave this question open on the Ning during this next month, the time for public response to the standards.

The Executive Committee, along with each of you, will study the standards document with a view toward its implications for assessment, professional development, and curriculum. I am sure we will each find points where we nod our heads in agreement (who could find fault with expecting that students would be able to “ascertain the origin, credibility, and accuracy of print and online sources” for example?) and other areas where we are less willing to show support. I hope you will use those points to guide your conversation on our Ning site.

Such a conversation, one that focuses on the consequences—positive or negative—is constructive and helpful as NCTE looks forward. A conversation focusing on particular standards we like or do not like does not move us forward and does not ultimately best serve our nation’s children or teachers. That said, no one should doubt that NCTE recognizes the limits of this standards document. But this is not a document we were asked to write; it is not a document we proposed. When asked to provide a critique, we responded; and when asked in the future for additional feedback, we stand ready to provide direction and critique. Regardless of whether or not NCTE or any organization supports this document, it exists. Therefore, it is not on the limits or the strengths of this one particular document that NCTE will focus its time, energies, or expertise; instead, we will focus on issues of what’s next.

By this I mean that no statement of standards changes things immediately and by itself. What shapes education is the translating of those standards into practice as we ask the next questions:

- How can assessments be improved so they genuinely measure and contribute to gains in student learning?

- How can professional development for teachers be improved so that every student is guided by a teacher who understands the needs of individual students and responds appropriately to those individual needs?

- What professional development experiences best support teachers in continuously improving their own literacy teaching practices?

\textsuperscript{11} The Ning is available at: http://ncte2008.ning.com/forum/topics/how-will-the-common-core-state.
• How can curriculum break down the artificial walls that segment literacy learning from student growth in all content areas: English, math, science, social studies, foreign language, music, and the arts?

Only after the process of asking and answering these questions will we begin to see where these standards have sustained and encouraged good teaching and learning and where we need to push beyond them to make certain that nothing is omitted, or lost, or undervalued.

The success of a democracy is based upon the ability of all its citizens to think and reason at the highest levels. Our democracy in the 21st century—with all of its problems and possibilities, composed of an increasingly diverse citizenry, and beset by the complexities of a global economy—demands the best educational system we have ever had. Achieving that standard will require the support of many—national and state policymakers, teacher-educators, classroom teachers, district- and building-level administrators and supervisors, parents, and students. NCTE is working systematically on the kinds of changes needed in professional development, assessment, and curriculum to make it possible for all students to fulfill their potential as learners. We encourage the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices to turn to NCTE for expert help in these areas.

The NCTE’s argument here invites members to discuss how they can work productively with the standards but not to contest the conditions under which the standards were developed.

Beers does not want members to represent the NCTE in ways she finds unproductive: focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the draft standards, she argues, would not serve students or teachers.

**WHY INTERVENE?**

As partial perspectives, the CCSI and the NCTE privilege and de-emphasize specific realities of teaching and learning. As a rhetorical critic (and literacy educator), my goal is to highlight the perspectives marginalized in debate. My argument here is that both the CCSI and the NCTE forward narrowed policy dramas as political commonsense. Moreover, such dramas constitute forms of trained incapacity: thinking about college- and career-readiness
only in terms of scene and agency ("we must have common standards to be internationally competitive in every state") or agents and agency ("we must have teacher judgment in context to prepare students for democratic participation") deflects other significant aspects of teaching and learning, such purpose and act. In addition to recognizing the need for a more sufficient vocabulary of motives, I attempt intervention to bring about the meeting of multiple perspectives. Without this dialectic, and without the maturation of discourses through counterstatement, there can be no interdependence, no sense of shared purpose, no cooperation. I am concerned with cooperation on this issue because I don’t see the prevailing debate strategies as supporting productive deliberation. The CCSI and the NCTE try, to differing degrees, to frame the standards issue using conservative and liberal strategies of social policy debates. For example, the CCSI compares educational policy to individual market investments: the deregulation of education implied by the CCSI’s makeup is acceptable because it increases educational outcomes. The NCTE, on the other hand, compares educational policy to democracy: the professionalism implied by the NCTE’s argument is acceptable because it strengthens the national commitment to pluralism, student engagement, and preparation for civic life.12 Although these strategies are commonplace in political debate over social policy, I object to this tendency to map the conventions of political discourse onto discussions of literacy education. I worry that literacy education risks becoming little more than another area of ideological investment in national political debate.

Above I mentioned the term “public professionalism.” By this I mean that the NCTE’s approach may need to invite a broader range of publics and perspectives to debate than it usually would. In the debate analyzed here, the NCTE appeals mostly to its

12 For more on market and non-market values in social policy, see Asen.
professional authority to define the goals and measures of literacy education. While the NCTE claims to represent public values, I don’t see it inviting public participation in the debate. The problem with the NCTE’s professionalism, I argue, is that it offers public audiences little if any role in the debate. The NCTE tries to re-define the scene and purpose of education (it’s diverse and education should prepare students to engage diverse audiences and contexts), but these ambiguities are already contested and the talking points calcified. (For example, the contests between “education should reflect diversity” and “education should be standardized” or “education is for democratic participation” and “education is for economic competition” are already well-established and conventionalized.)

I argue that literacy educators seeking to complement the NCTE’s approach can begin by identifying publicly agreeable points for discussion. By this I mean that educators should begin not with their conventional talking points (the scene is diverse, therefore the agency should be professionalism) but with inquiry into acts of teaching and learning. By inquiry into acts, I mean that teachers can pose questions like the following. What is it that students do with literacy (read, write, speak, listen, view, visually represent)? In what scenes, for example, do students read? With whom? For what purposes? Using what means? Likewise, what do teachers do in literacy classrooms (respond, instruct, correct)? In what scenes? Using what means? With whom? These questions reveal that students write in a variety of situations, with all kinds of purposes, in relationship with others, using different means.

13 In this paragraph I am describing Burke’s concept of a zone of recalcitrance (Prelli, Anderson, and Althouse 121). As I elaborate below, audiences within a zone of recalcitrance de-emphasize or resist dominant perspectives. In the context of the CCSI-NCTE debate, a zone of recalcitrance resists the dominant strategies of standards debate (market-based discourses vs. democracy-based discourses).

14 Here I am using the NCTE’s framework for 21st-century literacy.
Moreover, this understanding of literacy—as meaningful use in context and in relationship—highlights the limitation of a single perspective (like the CCSI’s) to account for all dimensions of literacy use and learning. My argument, then, is that by inviting inquiry into literacy using Burke’s pentad, educators can create a realist drama of their own. When audiences inquire into literacy teaching and learning experiences and acknowledge the broad range of scenes, acts, agents, agencies, and purposes involved, they can notice how a selective perspective, like the CCSI’s, fails to account for significant terms like agent and purpose. In this sense, the public professionalism I suggest has smaller goals than the sort of professionalism I sense the NCTE wishes it could command. Public professionalism gives up control over defining the goals and measures of literacy education, but what it gains is the recognition, among many publics, of the insufficiency of the CCSI’s terms and policies. In other words, I am proposing a long public game here, one that will probably not reward educators immediately with a displacement of the CCSI. Such public professionalism will also probably not bolster the NCTE’s conventional sense of political power. On the other hand, the kind of professionalism I am arguing for might complement a conventional sense of power in national debate. Generally speaking, I am looking to engage a broad set of publics, not just to defend teacher professionalism or to attack deregulationist/market-based discourses of education, but to heighten the demand for a sufficient vocabulary of motives around literacy education. In Prelli, Anderson, and Althouse’s term, I want to expand the “zones of recalcitrance” to dominant perspectives, and not just through appeals to teacher professionalism. Rather, I’m focused on starting from a mutually agreeable point (acts of literacy teaching and learning) and counting on the process of inquiry to raise public recalcitrance to the standards. At this point, the “zones of recalcitrance” to the CCSI are
narrow. Teachers and scholars object to the “common standards for international
competitiveness” argument, but the grounds of their objections (peer-reviewed research;
disciplinary-professional values) are not (for the most part) publicly accessible. Making the
grounds for critique publicly accessible strikes me as the first step toward building broader
public support for more sufficient terms for teaching and learning.\footnote{There’s a paradox here: teachers and scholars of literacy seeking to defend their own professionalism may need to work outside of it. The traditional appeals of the NCTE—to its specialized expertise—are valuable, but do not seem to broaden the zones of recalcitrance to the discourse of international competitiveness.}

AN APPROACH TO INTERVENTION

My intervention has four parts: the first is to establish a representative anecdote of the
CCSI’s argument. I choose to highlight the dramas enacted in the “Introduction,” the
“Criteria for Standards,” and the student capacities of the “Introduction” document. These
representative anecdotes show how the CCSI privileges scene and agency and marginalizes
purpose, act, and agent. The second part of my intervention is to show how the NCTE tries to
intervene in the CCSI’s drama. Specifically, I demonstrate how the NCTE tries to counter the
CCSI’s scene-agency drama with an agent-agency drama. Moreover, I argue that the NCTE
intervenes, but only manages a narrow zone of recalcitrance. My goal is to imagine a more
encompassing drama than the NCTE’s attempt at intervention. The third part of my
intervention is to show how educators could address the CCSI’s drama. I demonstrate how
educators can critique the CCSI’s argument through an act-based drama. My goal is to shift
the starting point of discussion to begin with act, raise awareness of the wide range of terms
needed to encompass acts of teaching and learning, and forward the need for an educational
pluralism that reflects act, agent, agency, scene, and purpose in literacy use, teaching, and learning. (In other words, my goal is to problematize public and policy discussions of literacy that don’t account for people and their purposes.) The fourth part is to perform what Linda Flower calls “the alternative discourse of inquiry”\(^{16}\): this is the process of inviting public attention to the gap between the CCSI’s discourse and the realities of teaching and learning. This process is not conventional advocacy but the invitation of public inquiry into and critique of dominant perspectives.

The CCSI’s argument enacts a drama in three primary ways: first, through the scene it sets and the action it promises (in the “Core FAQ” and the “Introduction to Standards” documents); second, through its criteria for standards in the “Considerations for Standards” document, the preamble in the “Criteria for Standards” document, and the definition of evidence in the “Introduction to Standards” document; and third, through its enumeration of student capacities (in the “Introduction to Standards” document). The central resolution in these dramas is of scene by agency. Yet as I argued in Chapter 3, the acts called for by the CCSI require more than agency—they require agent, act, and purpose. My aim is to point out how recalcitrance should arise from the CCSI’s drama; the NCTE’s critique is an effort to bring about such recalcitrance, but the zones of recalcitrance raised by the NCTE are narrow and/or constrained to disciplinary boundaries.

What is the NCTE’s response to this drama? The NCTE forwards an alternative definition of the scene as a way of critiquing the CCSI’s decision to advance a discourse (and

\(^{16}\) In *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*, Flower describes inquiry as an alternative practice of argument (36). I use Flower’s phrase here to describe the stance of public professionalism. Instead of using the conventional advocacy I see in the NCTE’s response (directly contesting the definition of the scene or the purpose of education), my argumentative strategy is to invite public audiences to inquire into acts of teaching and learning in order to develop a more sufficient discourse for education.
specifically an agency) that is ill-suited to the scene. The NCTE tries to intervene by enacting its own scene-agency drama (diversity demands pluralism), but this drama counters the dominant perspective of the CCSI mostly within the disciplines and professions of literacy educators. I try to expand the zone of recalcitrance beyond literacy educators and toward a broad range of publics by modeling inquiry into acts of teaching and learning. I see inquiry into act as an accessible and comprehensible form of critique. In its response to the CCSI, the NCTE attempts to enact a drama of professionalism that does not involve broader public participation in debate. This effort fails for a range of reasons, but my sense is that the NCTE cannot bring about broad public recalcitrance by contesting the CCSI stance on the basis of professional authority alone. The entry point of inquiry, I believe, is not the term of agent or purpose but of act. I suggest that educators begin with acts that are hard to contest (students read, write, speak, listen; teachers respond) rather than already-elaborated terms (the single scene of competition vs. the diverse scene of collaboration) that don’t allow for dialogue and deliberation.

**ACT-BASED DRAMAS: THE CENTRAL SCENE**

How could literacy educators enact a more encompassing drama and sponsor a critique of the CCSI? What are dramas of *act* to respond to the dramas of *scene-agency* enacted in the CCSI? The “Introduction” opens with a drama of scene determining purpose, act, agents, and agency: to survive in the global marketplace, we must have standards. Purpose is not articulated here (or just assumed). The NCTE, understandably, tries to shift this orientation by redefining purpose (by arguing that education is for democratic participation). However, outright contestation of the scene and purpose doesn’t seem to be
effective. What might invite public critique of the CCSI? I suggest educators begin with the acts outlined in the CCSI’s “Introduction” document: students read, write, speak, listen. Students compete. Students collaborate. Students adapt to change. Likewise, educators can identify acts of teaching and learning in the “Core FAQ”: students read, write, speak, listen. Teachers show, guide, and respond. For example, educators beginning with acts could pose the following questions. In what scenes do students read, write, speak, and listen? Specifically, when do they “compete”? These questions can prompt audiences to think of concrete experiences (their kids’ or their own) that involve literacy and competition. My sense is that audiences may struggle to identify concrete experiences of competition; furthermore, I anticipate audiences focusing on local contexts rather than on international comparisons among test scores. These two turns in discussion—from the abstract to the concrete, and from the international to the local—have the potential to reveal the multiple factors in student learning (agent, purpose, scene) and complicate the easy scene-agency drama of common standards for international competitiveness. Likewise, when the CCSI asserts that students are learning to different levels because every state has its own standards, I suggest educators begin with the act: students are indeed learning to different levels, and that is for all kinds of reasons, one of which might be each state’s different standards. But there is also the scene, agent, and purpose to account for in teaching and learning. In other words, public inquiry into act has the potential to unsettle the CCSI’s pat answers (in which students learn to different levels simply because standards vary from state to state). Moreover, this inquiry has the benefit of foregrounding a local and realist perspective on

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17 I mean here that the NCTE’s approach does not appear to invite the CCSI or groups like it to enter into inquiry. I imagine act as a more mutually agreeable starting point for public inquiry.
teaching and learning. Audiences who have inquired into their own (or their family’s) literacy use and learning are well-positioned to question dominant national discourse that emphasizes the framing of international test score comparisons in economic terms.

I find inquiry into acts applicable to other assertions the CCSI makes. In arguing that “standards are good for students,” the CCSI claims that common standards will allow teachers and parents to have the same expectations of students across a range of contexts, and with more consistent expectations, students can make transitions among different communities more successfully. The central acts of the CCSI’s drama are the following: standards prepare; standards make expectations consistent across different settings; students transfer location; students understand expectations; students direct their own learning. Inquiring into each of these acts shows how the different terms (scene, agent, agency, purpose) make the act possible. Standards can help prepare, but also needed are scene, act, agent, and purpose. (What local conditions and contexts—scenes—support teachers’ expectations of students? What can teachers do to indicate their expectations of students? How might individual teachers develop relationships with students that support specific expectations? And how might teachers understand and embrace the notion of common expectations for all students?) When these other terms are considered, audiences can experience recalcitrance: the terms of the CCSI are revealed as insufficient for reflecting the broad and varied realities of teaching and learning. In particular, the claim that standards will increase student self-understanding and self-direction suffers from scene-agency myopia.

I suggest a similar approach to the CCSI’s claim that its standards are “good for parents.” With these standards, the CCSI argues, parents will understand what is expected of students and can engage meaningfully in their child’s education. I suggest educators inquire
into these acts and reveal what terms are needed for parents to understand (and/or appreciate, respect, support) what is expected of students. Likewise, educators can inquire into parents’ meaningful engagement in their child’s education and reveal what all is needed: scene, agency, agent, act, purpose. Whatever meaningful engagement means, it is not covered by scene and agency in themselves. (For example, what would parents do, and in what kinds of situations? How would parents engage meaningfully in their child’s education—by visiting classrooms and speaking with literacy educators? Will standards bring about these acts? Will standards make parents want to support their child’s purposes for reading, writing, speaking, and listening?)

The CCSI claims its standards are “good for educators”: they will allow for more focused pre-service and professional development. I suggest educators ask the following question: what would focus pre-service teaching? My sense is that scene, agency, act, agent, and purpose are all needed to focus pre-service teaching. The CCSI’s claims (to help align teaching with assessments, tailor curriculum, and promote sharing of best practices) cannot be delivered on by standards alone. Instead, each of these acts depends on specific relationships among scenes, agents, acts, purposes, and agencies. The CCSI’s claim to deliver on these promises meets recalcitrance when audiences acknowledge the gap between the reality of educational change and reform and the narrow terms forwarded by the CCSI. (For example, does the practice and purpose of teacher education simply transform in response to the standards? What kinds of agents and purposes would be involved in such a transformation?) Again, all of these inquiries can be understood as critiques, but not as direct contestations of the scene, and agency, or the purpose. Rather, these inquiries invite audiences to evaluate the terms of the CCSI. My point is that educators beginning with an act-based
drama can reveal the need for a broader set of terms, which in turn can support pluralism as a reflection of the varied realities of teaching and learning.

**ACT-BASED DRAMAS: THE “CRITERIA FOR STANDARDS”**

To inquire into these criteria is to evaluate the CCSI’s discourse against the realities of teaching and learning. The CCSI claims, for example, that it will “eliminate inconsistencies among different states’ standards.” When the act is foregrounded, however—the consistency of standards will determine consistency among learning outcomes—the recalcitrant reality is revealed. The CCSI’s predicted outcome—in which policy successfully shapes practice—depends largely on variables of scene, agency, agent, act, and purpose. (While standards may become common, will they be interpreted and operationalized consistently across settings and across the range of teachers?) Similarly, when we consider that the CCSI will be “aligned with college and work expectations,” we can imagine a drama of act: the standards will enable students to “meet college and work expectations.” The CCSI treats the agency of standards as sufficient for transforming act, agent, and purpose. But what else is required for students to meet these expectations—what kinds of situations, people, relationships, and purposes? (Do students meet expectations because they have been “aligned” in policy documents?) In the same vein, the CCSI claims these standards will be “rigorous.” That is, agency (standards) will determine act (teaching) despite differences among scenes, purposes, or agents. For example, teachers who uphold rigor are going to fail some students. This is a purposeful act; it looks different in each scene, it requires a range of agencies to support this practice, and it varies with each agent. As we inquire into the act more fully, it becomes increasingly apparent that rigor depends on teachers acting in context
with a range of purposes. What are the reasons for which teachers fail students? What are the situations in which this happens? How is it done? These questions expose the complexity of actually bringing about the outcomes promised by the CCSI. Teachers who uphold rigor—however that is defined—are agents with purpose in context. No single agency (of standards) can ensure teaching and learning will reflect a single conception of “rigor.”

There’s a similar issue here with international benchmarking. While the agency of the CCSI may link standards to international tests of performance, that agency doesn’t necessarily transform agents, acts, and purpose. It doesn’t address the question of motivation and desire to work. Will the coordination of standards and international testing data lead to a different relationship of policy and practice? An act-based inquiry helps answer the question. What are the agents, the acts, the purposes, and the agencies in the settings involved in bringing international benchmarking data to bear on local teaching practice? In other words, to what extent can the agency of benchmarking transform scene (or purpose or act)? Answers to these questions suggest that agency alone is insufficient for the act of transformation after which the CCSI is aimed.

The “research- and evidence-based” claim might serve as the representative anecdote for the entire CCSI. The NCTE’s critique of the CCSI is that the evidence cited is largely drawn from corporate self-studies rather than from peer-reviewed research. While this critique is correct, the zone of recalcitrance it creates is limited to disciplinary-professional communities. That is, the audiences who care about the provenance of the CCSI’s citations probably agree with the NCTE anyway. My suggestion for critique is to begin with the act described in the CCSI’s citation. The CCSI’s claim is for agency (research and evidence) to be sufficient for transforming agents, acts, purpose, and scene. While the NCTE tries to
counter with another agency (peer-reviewed research) and purpose (i.e., education is also preparation for democratic participation, not just for economic competition), I don’t believe this bid invites public inquiry into the standards. What might open this inquiry is a set of questions using the pentad. What is the scene of the agency (the “research” and “evidence”)? Who are the agents who command this agency? What is their purpose? What are the acts? Answering these questions reveals how the evidence cited depends on specific agents, scenes, purposes, and acts (that is, corporate testing self-studies designed to affirm their validity and reliability). I argue this process of inquiry can at least reveal the narrowness of the CCSI’s agency (i.e., its corporate provenance); this inquiry may also suggest the need for a different, more adequate agency for representing teaching and learning.

**ACT-BASED DRAMAS: THE STUDENT CAPACITIES**

What are act-based dramas to evaluate the 8 student capacities cited by the CCSI in its “Introduction” document? The CCSI states that “*Students demonstrate independence as readers, writers, speakers, and listeners.*” As expected, the CCSI and the NCTE define independence differently. The NCTE elaborates the act to reveal that independence depends on purpose, agents, scene, and agency: students write “independently” when they have the opportunity to pursue their purposes for writing in relationship with others. In the NCTE’s argument, changing teaching and learning is not merely a matter of applying a single agency to all scenes. The point of the NCTE’s critique is to bring about recalcitrance, or to assess the CCSI’s preferred terms (which figure writing as a capacity ensured by standards) against the realities of writing. However, I’m not convinced that the NCTE’s response engages audiences outside the disciplines and professions associated with literacy education. How
might educators respond to the CCSI in this case? As above, I suggest modeling pentadic inquiry into the acts described here. In what scenes do students write independently? With what purposes? With or for whom? Using what means? Audiences responding to these questions can imagine themselves or students they know; with these concrete images of literacy use and learning, audiences can evaluate the CCSI's terms. Do these terms reflect the specific relationships among purpose, agent, and scene they have noted in their own or their kids' experiences? (For example, what kind of relationship between friends prompts a teenage boy to write fan fiction independently? Can standards prompt this kind of purpose in writers and readers?)

This inquiry process can be used to explore the CCSI's other student capacities. The CCSI claims that students will build "strong content knowledge" by engaging with "works of quality and substance." The need for such content knowledge is taken as sufficient for motivation, but educators can inquire into the act of acquiring knowledge. The CCSI doesn't acknowledge the other terms required for "strong content knowledge": agent, act, purpose, scene. The CCSI hopes for a transformation of purpose, agents, and acts—all by the agency. An inquiry into acts can reveal how students build strong content knowledge in a variety of scenes, for a variety of purposes, with a range of agents, and using a range of agencies. This sort of drama could show both that "strong content knowledge" can be achieved without the CCSI and that "quality and substance" depend on the scene, the agents, their purposes, and their acts. (For example, educators might ask what kinds of relationships with friends and teachers shape adolescent students' desire to read texts from high literary tradition. These kinds of relationships are omitted from the CCSI's vocabulary.)
The CCSI also claims that its standards will ensure that students “respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline.” This competency, when inquired into as an act, can be explored more fully. Educators can ask, in what scenes do students “respond to the varying demands of audience, task, purpose, and discipline”? With and for whom? Using what means? With what purposes? Answers to these questions reveal the terms involved in the act: relationships with agents, a sense of shared purpose with teachers and/or classmates, a compelling scene, an agency that matches their own. All of these factors extend beyond a single scene and agency and encompass agent and purpose. (For example, what might prompt a student to inquire into and try to meet the conventions and expectations of a discipline or a specific audience? Do standards encompass student motivation and purpose?) Inquiry into acts reveals that the gap between the CCSI’s scene-agency drama and the complex and varied reality of act.

The CCSI also calls for students to “comprehend as well as critique”: students should be engaged, open-minded, skeptical, diligent, questioning. An inquiry into this act might pose the following questions. In what scenes would students “comprehend as well as critique”? What would students use to do this? Who would they do it with or for? With what purpose? This line of inquiry reveals that the act sought by the CCSI is complex but its discourse is limited to scene and agency. I understand that the CCSI wants students to be able to do these acts (or exhibit these capacities) without reliance on other terms or perspectives. The core debate between the CCSI and the NCTE is a broader educational one: should our expectations of students be contextual and contingent, or should they be independent of these factors? The scene-agency perspective of the CCSI says yes—in the name of rigor and simplicity, students should be able to do what is asked no matter what the scene; the alternate
perspective of the NCTE says no—in the name of accommodating complex realities, students should engage in purposeful use of literacy. This debate is not one I can settle here, but what I can forward is a process of inquiry that reveals how scene-agency drama alone does not transform purpose, act, and agent for all situations.

The next act described in the CCSI concerns “evidence.” The standards call for students to privilege it, cite it, and evaluate it; the research is relevant and the reasoning for using it is clearly presented. What would be involved in all students using evidence in these ways? I suggest educators ask, in which scenes would students use evidence as requested? With whom and for whom? Using what means? And with what purpose? Answers to these questions can reveal the diverse reasons for which students actually use evidence and unsettle the CCSI’s technocratic perspective on student purpose (in which they’ll use evidence because the standards say they will). These sorts of inquiries can also bring the discussion of student “capacities” from the level of internationally-benchmarked standards to local and concrete practice. For example, audiences might ask when and how they or their children use evidence in writing. What purposes motivate the use of evidence? What kinds of audiences? Answers to these questions, drawn from audiences’ own experiences, can expose the distance between the CCSI’s discourse and the realities of students’ literacy use and learning.

The next act listed by the CCSI concerns students “caring about precision,” making choices between specific words, details, and data. As above, I suggest educators ask the following: what are the scenes, agencies, agents, and purposes involved in a case when a student cares about precision in speaking or writing? Inquiry into this act can reveal students who care about precision for specific reasons not foreseen by the CCSI. (For example, audiences might note that their kids care about precision in the context of certain
relationships with teachers or in relation to a specific teacher’s purpose. Audiences might also note the limits of a single agency to transform agents and purpose across all contexts.) The overall goal of this inquiry would be to reveal how the CCSI claims full-scale transformation of agents but limits its discussion to scene and agency. In short, the goal would be to reveal the insufficiency of the CCSI’s terms for encompassing a range of teaching and learning experiences.

The CCSI calls for students to “craft and look for structure,” both in their own work and in analyzing other writers’ work. While these expectations of students are more or less shared by the NCTE and literacy educators more broadly, educators can still pose questions. Most notably, why would students do this work? An inquiry into acts can highlight the different settings in which students craft and look for structure as writers. Who are the agents involved in craft? What are the specific acts that make up the work of craft? What agencies or means do students (or teachers) draw on in the process of crafting writing? With what purposes do students craft their writing? From the CCSI’s perspective on literacy teaching and learning, students craft because the standards say they should whereas the NCTE argues that student purpose and meaningful literacy experiences should be the central factor in teaching and learning. That is, “craft” should be understood as an experience arising from specific contexts and not as a skill or outcome that can be expected of every student regardless of context, purpose, or the people involved. By inquiring into acts, educators can help public audiences evaluate the CCSI against the diverse realities of literacy use and learning.

Finally, the CCSI calls for students to “use technology strategically and capably.” As above, I suggest educators ask what needs to be in place for students’ technology use to be
strategic and capable. What needs to be present—what sort of relationship among scene, agency, agent, purpose—to bring about this act? For example, in what situations do you or your children use technology strategically—for extracurricular purposes, with friends, as part of an organization? What means do you or your kids use—hardware and software knowledge, institutional resources and support, professional experience? With whom or for whom do you use technology strategically? And most importantly, why do you use technology in these ways? What motivates you? These sorts of relationships are not considered in the CCSI; instead, the CCSI simply forwards agency. As above, the contested issue is whether the necessities of specific skills compel students’ cooperation. Does telling students they need to be internationally competitive motivate them? Does saying this transform the local scene, act, agent, purpose? Again, I believe educators can highlight the conflict between the reality of act (the range of ways that audiences actually use technology) and the perspective of the CCSI by sponsoring inquiry into experiences of literacy use and learning. Highlighting this conflict between experience and the CCSI’s discourse can, in turn, raise the demand for a more sufficient set of terms for describing literacy as it is practiced.

**CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I have described a form of public engagement—the invitation to audiences to inquire into the acts of literacy use, teaching, and learning. I imagine this inquiry as the beginning of a public critique of the CCSI—the building of zones of recalcitrance. In the next chapter, I’ll analyze efforts by educators to expand the zones of recalcitrance to the CCSI. While I am aligned with these efforts, I also notice that they (like the NCTE) tend to rely on conventional dramas of professionalism (agent-agency) and do not
fully exploit the inquiry into acts I describe in this chapter. My suggestion, in the next chapter, is for ways that these educators can model inquiry into acts as a way of sponsoring public critique of the CCSI.
CHAPTER VI

RHETORICAL EDUCATION FOR PUBLIC PROFESSIONALISM

Up to this point, I have described public professionalism as the practice of inviting public inquiry into and critique of conventionalized perspectives in order to bring about a more mature discourse of teaching and learning. In this chapter, I describe how literacy educators can become public professionals. First, I analyze public professionalism as a rhetorical education for literacy educators. Second, I show how such a rhetorical education enacts the democratic values forwarded by Lloyd Bitzer, John Dewey, and Linda Flower. Third, to show how public professionalism can complement current responses to the CCSI, I compare my proposal and recent arguments by Linda Darling-Hammond, Yong Zhao, Gerald Bracey, and Mike Rose. My overall argument is that literacy educators seeking to respond to arguments like the CCSI’s need to be prepared to complement conventional professional critiques by sponsoring public inquiry into acts of teaching and learning.

A RHETORICAL EDUCATION FOR LITERACY EDUCATORS

In this project, I have suggested that my goal is to prepare teachers and scholars to engage public audiences in debates over the goals and measures of literacy education. In this section of this chapter, I define the term “rhetorical education” and describe its relationship to Burke’s democratic dialectic. In particular, I am working with Walter Jost’s definition of rhetorical education as a sense of “the history, theory, criticism, and practice of ‘public discourse’” (“Logos” 21). This sense equips students with “rhetorical power,” or the ability to discover “what really warrants our assent among competing frameworks or horizons of
understanding" ("Teaching" 3). With this power, Jost suggests, students can begin the "building of character, community and truth" (3). Like Jost, David Fleming argues that the aim of study of rhetoric is character (179). Fleming believes rhetoric should form good citizens and skillful thinkers, not rule-bound or by-the-book thinkers (180). Thomas Miller, elaborating the goal of developing character, identifies phronesis (practical wisdom) as the "practical ideal for situated action" (78). Thomas Darwin, also writing about phronesis, argues that practical judgment is not only rational but affective as well (27). To deal effectively with contingency, Darwin explains, judgment needs to be relational: it "evolves from and involves relationships between people" (25). Part of this relationality, in Ellen Cushman’s analysis, is a commitment to serving underserved publics (181).

As I synthesize these scholars’ perspectives, rhetorical education prepares students to question dominant warrants for assent. The suggestion in these scholars’ arguments is that commonsense and conventionalized communication do not warrant a rhetorically educated person’s assent. In other words, these scholars say obliquely what Burke says openly, which is that resistance to dominant perspectives constitutes a viable mode of critique. When I combine these scholars with Burke, rhetorical education becomes a way of preparing educators to inquire into and critique perspectives that—while they may be widely received as commonsense—do not merit this assent. Rhetorical education, though, is not only a matter of opening inquiry on one’s own, but also (as I have argued here) a matter of inviting public inquiry in order to expand the zones of recalcitrance to dominant perspectives and to mature discourses. My argument, then, is that Burke’s goals for a democratic dialectic align with the goals of a contemporary rhetorical education. This alignment is not without tension, however. How, for example, does Burke’s anarchic democracy relate to Jost’s “character,
community, and truth” (3)? Burke’s democrat is described as an “antinomian” (Wolin 7, 97) or a “negativist” (Burke Counter-Statement 115); what kind of character would this democracy support? If the democrat believes “when in Rome, do as the Greeks” (119), what is his or her place in a community? Also, if for a democrat “the nearest approach to a doctrine is the doctrine of interference” (115), what is the relationship to community collaboration and cooperation? Finally, if the pentad “does not promise demystification in the form of some final synthesis culminating in truth” (Anderson and Prelli 73), what is the democrat’s relationship to truth?

I argue that the character of the democrat is one committed to dialectic (Philosophy 444). Stated more strongly, the character of the democrat is a partisan for dialectic, even when that dialectic may undermine his or her preferred terms or perspectives. Is this a character that can build a community? I see the democrat functioning in a community as a goad to conventionalized thinking, fighting proceduralism (Philosophy 444), preferring instead “a colossal getting in one’s own way” (Counter-Statement 114). For a community, then, the democrat reminds citizens that their judgments are made under conditions of contingency and that their perspectives are partial. But what about a Burkean approach to truth? Burke’s democrat is committed to the search for “faithful reflections of reality” (Grammar 59) but he or she realizes that any reflection is also a selection and a deflection of reality. Any terminologies, then, are subject to critique. What is the hope of all this critique and dialectic? In A Rhetoric of Motives, Burke suggests that argument is like a human barnyard.

[Rhetoric] must lead us through the Scramble, the Wrangle of the Market Place, the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard, the Give and Take, the wavering line of pressure and counterpressure, the Logomachy, the onus of ownership, the War of Nerves, the War. It too has its peaceful moments: at
times its endless competition can add up to the transcending of itself. In ways of its own, it can move from the factional to the universal. But its ideal culminations are more often beset by strife as the condition of their organized expression or material embodiment. (23)

“At times, the endless competition can add up to the transcending of itself”: at times, that is, there are moments when dialectic brings a more fully rounded (Grammar xv) perspective into being. But those moments are short-lived. The democrat, in short, advances an anarchic view of character, community, and truth. Each of these qualities, cited as aims in Jost’s formulation of rhetorical education, becomes a process in Burke’s democracy.

What is the relationship between Burke’s dialectic and practical, ethical judgment for action under conditions of uncertainty (phronesis)? If "practical" is defined as taking a path of minimum resistance, the democrat might resist practical action on the grounds that it resembles proceduralism (Philosophy 444). Practical might, however, be understood as leading to action; act, as the central term of Burke’s dialectic, would likely be embraced by the democrat, especially if this act disrupts a “technological psychosis” (Anderson and Prelli 89), or an overreliance on agency to resolve any problem. The democrat would also appreciate an ethics based on multiple perspectives. An ethics that prescribes a system of values without consideration of multiple scenes, agents, acts, purposes, and agencies would earn the democrat’s resistance as a “perspective of perspectives” (89). Given conditions of uncertainty, the democrat would appreciate an ethics that accounted for process and inquiry.

“Allow full scope to the dialectic process,” Burke argues, “and you establish a scene in which the protagonist of a thesis has maximum opportunity to modify his thesis, and so mature it, in the light of the antagonist’s rejoinders” (Philosophy 444). Cut out this process, however, and the democrat would champion what is counter: more consideration of alternate scenes, agents, and purposes—especially those representing underserved publics. Here, as
above, I can imagine the democrat eager to fight the powers that be (Counter-Statement 115) and champion the terms and values of the marginalized.

Given this stance, how might the democrat respond to the arguments for educational professionalism? In this analysis, I have understood the NCTE’s professionalism as a symbolic drama of agent-agency: in other words, endow the right agents (professional educators) with authority to ensure the implementation of the appropriate agency (research-informed judgment in context). Uphold educators’ professionalism to ensure the public good (preparation for democratic participation, personal development, student engagement). I can anticipate the democrat’s objection when the NCTE forwards its agents (and agency) as the only appropriate means for the scene. For example, why should teachers’ and scholars’ agency (disciplinary research) be more appropriate to the scene than the testing companies’ self-studies? This question raises the issue of purpose: what kind of purpose is appropriate for the scene? Must the goals and measures of literacy education be devised by public school teachers and scholars? Or can they also be informed by testing companies’ comparisons of international test data? What are the boundaries of the profit motive and the educational desire to support and sponsor? These questions reveal the conflict between the Burkean democratic stance and the NCTE’s professionalism. For the NCTE to maintain its professional standing, it must insist that teachers and scholars, rather than corporate and political groups, define the goals and measures of teaching and learning. This insistence, however, seeks to prevent other agents from being considered as appropriate for the scene. With this conflict in mind, can a Burkean partisanship for dialectic form the basis of a rhetorical education for literacy educators? Can Burke’s democratic dialectic guide public professionalism? Specifically, the democrat takes what Linda Flower calls a “strong rivaling
stance” (55), seeking a full range of perspectives in the hope of arriving at a sufficient set of terms for defining the goals and measures of teaching and learning. This means, in the context of the debate, that the democrat would seek to open debate to a full range of agents and agencies instead of narrowing the range to those approved by the NCTE or the CCSI. At the same time, however, the democrat’s resistance to dominant perspectives would likely bristle at the CCSI’s insistence on competition and competitiveness as the single goal and measure of education. The practice of public professionalism in the NCTE-CCSI debate, then, would not be clear, but it would resist the scene-agency dramas forwarded by both the CCSI and the NCTE.

What would the democrat (or a public professional) actually support? I argue that s/he would support public inquiry into and critique of standards that claim to represent teaching and learning. Literacy educators who become public professionals would occupy a vexed place in their disciplines and professions: they would be committed to public participation and engagement in defining the goals and measures of literacy education while at the same time aiming for a vocabulary sufficient to reflect the diversity of students’ literacy experiences. How might public professionals square their disciplinary-professional values with their commitment to democratic participation in public education? To answer this question, I draw on three perspectives on public knowledge and engagement from Lloyd Bitzer, John Dewey, and Linda Flower. I argue that Burke’s democratic dialectic can enable educators to fulfill both their professional and democratic aims through the practice of public inquiry and critique.
In “Rhetoric and Public Knowledge,” Lloyd Bitzer characterizes public knowledge as the kind “needed in public life to accredit truth and value and to authorize decision and action” (68). The task of rhetoric is to “assist the formulation and creation of that knowledge and method constitutive of wisdom characterizing a universal public” (91). Yet the “universal audience is never fully realized in an actual, or particular audience, but exists as an ideal formulated by the speaker or by a group, profession, or culture” (“Political” 245).

For the speaker, the particular audience, and not the universal audience, will offer to authorize particular values or beliefs as “public.” The obligation of the speaker would be to uphold a standard of universal publicity in the face of multiple and specific publics. This means “a speaker or writer who desires to win the adherence of the universal audience will give up arguments that this audience—as he conceives it—would find inadmissible, even when he is addressing a particular audience. He will deem it almost immoral to resort to an argument which is not, in his own eyes, a rational one” (245). In other words, the standard of rhetorical engagement is higher than that of persuasion.

It is obvious that we need to judge and persuade not on the basis of whimsy, falsehood, or inadequate information and methods, but rather on the basis of purposeful deliberation which employs as much truth as the subject matter admits and proceeds systematically through methods of investigation, evaluation, and communication suited to the subject, the audience, and the purpose. The former implies inculcation of beliefs in the absence of critical deliberation, while rhetoric insists on rational justification. The craft of persuasion reduces truth and value to the role of tactic for the sake of making people believe or do what the communicator desires, while rhetoric is committed to truth and value as regulative principles. (228)
Does this mean that the rhetorical standard of the universal audience is absolute? Not exactly. Bitzer argues that no audience is ideally competent; in fact, sometimes, an audience is incompetent to judge public matters, and

a speaker who persuades such an [imperfect] audience may have to use premises drawn from its field of beliefs and commitments even though these grounds of assent would be rejected by a more competent audience. For responsible speakers, such occasions pose an obvious dilemma, sometimes escaped by designing a message that would be acceptable to the most competent audience and at the same time is persuasive to the audience addressed. Occasionally, the dilemma cannot be escaped, and with reference to it Quintilian remarked that the advocate might need to deceive a bad judge in order to make justice prevail. (245)

After upholding the universal public standard, Bitzer recognizes that specific audiences authorize different values and knowledge as public. Sometimes, these audiences authorize knowledge that is not characteristic of the universal public: sometimes audiences are “bad judges.”

What is the relationship between Bitzer’s argument on public knowledge and a Burkean stance on professionalism? Bitzer’s argument is that the standard of rhetorical engagement is higher than political persuasion. A speaker who respects this standard won’t use arguments he or she would consider irrational. Rather, a Bitzerian standard would guide speakers to seek the authorization of a universal audience, even if that universal audience does not exist. I understand Bitzer’s adherence to the standard of the universal audience as akin to Burke’s anarchic realism: both want to sustain inquiry into public arguments in order to reach a more mature perspective. I use Burke’s counterstatements as a method for upholding Bitzer’s standard of public knowledge. Specifically, educators can sponsor public inquiry into standards using Burke’s pentad. This, in my analysis, is a way for educators to invite public participation in defining the goals and measures of education. This sort of
inquiry begins with realist drama—a focus on the acts of teaching and learning described in
the standards. The CCSI claims that its standards will ensure that all students “demonstrate
independence as readers, writers, speakers, and listeners.” Above I suggested that educators
pose questions using the pentad: in what situations might students demonstrate
acts? Answers to these questions, as I argued above, disclose the diversity of students’
literacy experiences and reveal the insufficiency of a single agency—the standards—to
ensure students’ independence. (This line of questioning also undermines the notion of
“independence” by revealing the factors involved in using and learning literacy.) Here, in my
analysis, is an example of a process for creating public knowledge of the standards. At the
same time, I believe this public knowledge also forms a critique of the standards. The
NCTE’s goal in its response is to broaden the terms of the CCSI—to show that standards
alone do not transform teaching and learning. However, the NCTE’s approach, as I have
argued above, has been to assert its professional standing. Without public inquiry of the kind
I am describing, the NCTE’s assertion of professional authority simply contends with the
CCSI’s claim to authority. The public inquiry I propose not only exposes the limits of the
CCSI; it also points the way toward a more sufficient set of terms for teaching and learning.
The public inquiry and critique I propose, in effect, do what the NCTE is trying to do, but
they take a different approach—one I argue is more in line with Bitzer’s definition of public
knowledge.

I envision the relationship between Bitzer and Burke as similar to the relationship
between Dewey and Burke. In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey advances a vision of
democracy as community built around common interests (144-47) and cooperative action
The possibility of community and cooperation depends on communication, but in Dewey’s view, effective communication requires a public capacity for the critical evaluation of claims. Science and the knowledge of the disciplines and professions have become too specialized to inform public judgment. Meaningful public judgment, Dewey argues, must be based on continuous inquiry into current events. Dewey envisions public inquiry as a way to break up conventional thinking about public issues.

How might Burkean inquiry help educators fulfill Dewey’s vision of public engagement? And, how might Burkean inquiry and critique enable educators to reconcile the demands of professionalism and democracy? As above, I argue that Burke’s pentad offers educators a way to invite public inquiry into conventionalized communication or dominant perspectives. In this way, educators can do what Dewey suggests, which is to sponsor inquiry into and critique of perspectives like the CCSI’s. But, educators can do this not just as professionals with unidirectional expertise. Rather, educators can offer accessible prompts that enable contemporaneous inquiry and critique. Burkean inquiry and critique offers a way to advance disciplinary-professional values—the recognition of diversity in literacy experience; the appreciation of pluralism as an appropriate policy response to diversity—through public participation. Public audiences participating in pentadic inquiry and critique, in other words, have a role to play in debate other than simply assenting to the expertise of whichever professional group. In the context of the CCSI-NCTE debate, this engagement and participation is significant. The goal of the NCTE’s critique of the CCSI is to create new public knowledge about standards. The NCTE’s critique—which relies on audiences’ acceptance of specific definitions of the scene and purpose of education—can become
accessible to public audiences who may not agree on definitions of the scene and purpose of education. The overall point is that a Burkean inquiry and critique offers a way to enact Dewey’s vision but also to fulfill a compromise between professionalism and democracy.

There is another important quality to Burkean inquiry and critique, and that is its encompassing, rather than restricting, invitation to public participation. I have been working thus far with Linda Flower’s definition of inquiry as an “alternative argumentative practice” (36). By this Flower means that inquiry is not reducible to advocacy or analysis. Rather, the function of inquiry is to draw out the situated knowledge of participants in order to ensure that “public” knowledge represents a full range of perspectives. In Burke, Bitzer, Dewey, and Flower, the concern is that knowledge recognized as “public” will marginalize or exclude a range of perspectives from consideration. For these scholars, what is authorized as public or democratic should reflect shared values. Teachers and scholars of literacy have a specific challenge, in that their own professionalism depends on restricting the range of perspectives in debate on the goals and measures of education. But, my argument is that teachers, by inviting public inquiry and critique, are still upholding their disciplinary-professional values. They’re doing so, however, through the means of public participation. This participation, in Burke, Bitzer, Dewey, and Flower, has the potential to foster recalcitrance (the refusal of reality to be accommodated by a discourse) and the maturation of the CCSI’s discourse. Educators sponsoring public inquiry into and critique of the standards can undermine the commonsense of the “common-standards-for-international-competitiveness” argument and advance a public critique in addition to the NCTE’s largely professional critique. However, even though Burkean inquiry and critique might open dialectic—questions about whether competitiveness suffices as the purpose of literacy education—it would not necessarily lead
to the NCTE’s desired policy outcomes. As I have described it here, a rhetorical education for educators (using the pentad to sponsor public inquiry into and critique of political commonsense) recognizes that dialectic provides a way to shift the discourse of teaching and learning but not necessarily to ensure professional status in debate.

Given the tension between dialectic and professionalism, should Burkean critique serve as the basis for public professionalism? I argue that it represents a method for enacting the values of Bitzer, Dewey, and Flower: specifically, the dialectic can function as a tactic to crack apart conventionalized communication, expand recalcitrance, bring about the maturation of discourse, and create new public knowledge. What, though, is the political potential of Burkean partisanship for dialectic? As I see it, the potential is to begin with act and insist on realist perspectives, which I argue will be radically plural and in conflict with the preferred terms of partisans for deregulation (the CCSI) or professionalism (the NCTE). My emphasis on act is an attempt to imagine a starting point for discussion that might be agreeable to a broad range of public audiences. Public as well as professional audiences can participate in realist drama that reveals the multiple scenes, agents, agencies, and purposes implied in each act. This inquiry is a start toward a fuller dialectic among perspectives that can lead to policy discourse that acknowledges the complexity of teaching and learning.

Preparing educators to be Burkean democrats is a way of teaching rhetorical power but also a way of challenging educators to understand power in a Burkean way—namely, as something that is almost always to be opposed. The character of the Burkean democrat is to attend to relationships that would complicate dominant perspectives. However, I argue that educators’ public rhetorical practice should not be to argue for relationality (which becomes a “trust my agency, not yours” argument). Instead, I see the argument on the basis of realist
drama as a invitation in public debate to inquiry and deliberation. I have argued that realist drama (what are the scenes, agents, agencies, and purposes involved in this act?) can break up the conventional policy and debate discourse. The difficult part of a Burkean rhetorical education for educators will be to take an antinomian stance on dominant discourse. The impulse among educators accustomed to conventional professionalism will likely be to provide a synthesis toward truth and resolution—that is, toward the NCTE’s preferred terms. I argue that what we can hope for in national debate is counterstatement, recalcitrance, and maturation. A rhetorical education, in the tradition I’ve described, is certainly a commitment to bringing marginalized perspectives to the fore. The Burkean angle is a suspicion of arriving at a perspective of perspectives, as in the rhetoric of professionalism.

Who, in my analysis, invites public discovery and inquiry along the lines of Burke, Dewey, Bitzer, and Flower? In the following section, I analyze current arguments by Linda Darling-Hammond, Yong Zhao, Gerald Bracey, and Mike Rose. In particular, I describe the models of public engagement these arguments offer literacy educators.

**RESPONDING TO THE CCSI (OR ARGUMENTS LIKE IT): DARLING-HAMMOND, ZHAO, BRACEY, AND ROSE**

In this chapter, I have argued for Burke’s democratic dialectic as the basis of public professionalism. In particular, I have demonstrated ways in which literacy educators can use Burke’s pentad to inquire into and critique conventionalized communication, expand recalcitrance, bring about the maturation of discourse, and create new public knowledge about teaching and learning. In this section of the chapter, I analyze several current public critiques of the CCSI or arguments like it. I examine these arguments with two questions:
which terms are featured, and does this argument invite public inquiry and critique? I
examine arguments by Linda Darling-Hammond, Yong Zhao, Gerald Bracey, Mike Rose,
Tony Wagner, and Ronald Wolk to illustrate the challenges of public professionalism in
actual current public writing. I close the chapter with suggestions for the tactics of public
professionalism—how educators can adapt these writers’ arguments for use in their own
contexts.

In *The Flat World and Education: How America’s Commitment to Equity will
Determine Our Future* (2010), Linda Darling-Hammond argues that the scene (of
globalization and a flat world) demands a new agency (higher-level skills in workers than is
demanded by our education and training systems, which were designed to provide only a
rudimentary education) (1). Teaching now must address a full range of skills, including the
abilities to

- Design, evaluate, and manage one’s work so that it continually improves;
- Frame, investigate, and solve problems using a wide range of tools and resources;
- Collaborate strategically with others;
- Communicate effectively in many forms;
- Find, analyze, and use information for many purposes;
- Develop new products and ideas. (2)

Given the need for these skills, Darling-Hammond insists, a “transmission-oriented”
curriculum is untenable for the U.S. The achievement gap among U.S. students—the broad
and frequently-noted difference between affluent and poor students’ standardized test
scores—is interpreted as a threat to international competitiveness and workforce
preparedness. Darling-Hammond concludes that equity is the priority for a flat world (26).
Standards and accountability will not address the problem of inequality: in Darling-
Hammond’s view, there can be no “testing without investing” (73). To ensure high-quality
teachers and curriculum, Darling-Hammond argues, we must emulate successful
international models of investment in teaching and support that increase the professionalization of teachers rather than deregulate the profession (233).

As a drama, Darling-Hammond’s argument claims that since the scene has changed, the appropriate agency is no longer a transmission-oriented curriculum and assessment against standards. Rather, the appropriate agency addresses inequality by setting high expectations and providing high support. To enable all students’ success, Darling-Hammond insists, we must build capacity among teachers through professionalization. International competitiveness depends on our commitment to equity. We can uphold democratic equality through preserving the professionalism of teachers. That is, we have a widely recognized scene (the flat world), but we have the wrong agency. The right agency (professionalization) is not only right for the scene but also fulfills our sense of purpose (democratic equality of opportunity for students). As in the NCTE’s argument, we need the right agents (professional educators) to deliver the appropriate agency.

Are public audiences are invited to inquire into acts of teaching and learning? Darling-Hammond does offer a contrast of two scenes, one in Singapore and the other in California, to demonstrate the vast difference between schools (6-7). Yet I read these scenes as all-encompassing: any agent in these scenes, Darling-Hammond suggests, would thrive (in the well-run Singapore classroom) or struggle (in the decaying California school). Darling-Hammond’s argument invites audiences to assent to the right agents, who can be trusted to implement the right agency for the scene in order to fulfill the agreed-upon purpose. But public audiences are not invited to define this purpose or to inquire into acts of teaching and learning. As a result of these choices, I read Darling-Hammond’s drama as a professional rather than a public one. This analysis is not a dismissal of Darling-Hammond’s argument or
motives; rather, it is an assessment of her rhetorical strategy as a mode of public engagement. Educators seeking to use Darling-Hammond’s argument for equity, for example, might complement her current effort in two ways. First, educators can broaden her drama to examine agents acting with purpose in a variety of scenes. This tactic can help public audiences imagine teachers actually implementing pedagogies that support equity. Second, as a general strategy, educators can invite public audiences to inquire into acts of teaching and learning pertinent to Darling-Hammond’s argument. Here educators can ask public audiences to describe the 21st-century skills listed above: in what scenes do their kids “communicate effectively in many forms”? With whom, using what means, for what purposes, in what acts? Answers to these questions can bring the discussion of global competitiveness from the scene to the agent; such answers also set up discussion around the issues the NCTE raises, such as how educators can engage students in a variety of scenes. In short, educators seeking to use Darling-Hammond’s arguments can adapt her drama to engage public audiences while also advancing equity as a central purpose of education.

Yong Zhao’s Catching Up or Leading the Way: American Education in the Age of Globalization (2009) enacts a drama similar to Darling-Hammond’s: the globalized scene requires innovation, and we meet this need when we personalize and diversify rather than standardize and centralize (x). Given the demands of globalization, Zhao argues that American education is at a crossroads. There are two paths in front of us: one in which we destroy our strengths in order to ‘catch up’ with others in test scores and one in which we build on our strengths so we can keep the lead in innovation and creativity. It is my hope that this book can help change the discourse about education in the United States and convince some of the readers that ‘leading the way’ is a better idea. (xii)

To implement the agency for the scene, we need to focus on agents: “We must think globally in terms of what knowledge and skills our children will need so that they can exercise their
inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in the globalized world” (112).

For Zhao, we will best prepare students for this world by encouraging creativity and problem-solving rather than the memorizing of facts (150-51). Given the diverse scene of the globalized world, we should also teach students “tolerance for multiple perspectives, different talents, and a respect for diversity” (159).

Like Darling-Hammond, Zhao appropriates the “flat world” drama usually forwarded by deregulationists of education but disputes the agency. The appropriate agency for the scene will be delivered by professional educators, not by the agents of deregulation (like the CCSI). The scene is the demand for creativity and innovation; since these are agent-based qualities, we need to personalize and diversify. Therefore, the appropriate agency to uphold global citizenship and competition is pluralism, and that pluralism should be based in teacher judgment in context. Agencies that ignore agents, purpose, or context—for Zhao, these include standards, punishment, and measurement—represent policies that violate educational values. Zhao’s proposal entails investment in and support/latitude for teachers and students rather than narrowed control.

What is the public role in all this? The public is advised to look at the representative anecdotes of the global scene; moreover, public audiences are urged to assent to professional views, not those of the deregulationists-via-standards and accountability regime. As in my discussion of Darling-Hammond, this analysis of Zhao is not intended as a dismissal; rather, my point is that the potential reach of Zhao’s argument is limited by its reliance on scene-agency drama. Educators seeking to adapt Zhao’s argument to their own contexts might invite public inquiry into acts to demonstrate the need for personalization and pluralization in schools. For example, educators might ask parents or administrators to describe an
experience (theirs or a student’s) of personalizing learning. In what scene did it take place? What was the purpose? Who were the agents involved? What were the means? This sort of inquiry offers audiences a basis for imagining personalization not only as a response to global demands but also as a local means of understanding and engaging themselves or students they know. Without adapting Zhao’s argument to emphasize acts, however, educators employing the personalization argument run the risk of being read as merely defending professional status. By adapting Zhao to the local context, I argue, educators can advance their status as unique agents who exercise informed judgment in context.

In *Education Hell: Rhetoric vs. Reality* (2009), Gerald Bracey enacts a drama much like the previous two. He begins with a long list of personal qualities developed through education, including creativity, critical thinking, resilience, motivation, persistence, curiosity, inquisitiveness, endurance, reliability, enthusiasm, civic-mindedness, self-awareness, self-discipline, leadership, compassion, empathy, courage, imagination, sense of humor, resourcefulness, humility (4). These qualities locate teaching and learning in agents and purpose as well as agency. Bracey argues that education is about purpose, as in Thomas Jefferson’s sense of it for democratic participation (18-19). The problem, Bracey insists, is that the public narrative of school failure prevents audiences from focusing on the essential qualities of people we are trying to develop. The dominant agency (standards, accountability) is the wrong one because it defines the scene incorrectly as one of failure that needs reform (57). For Bracey, the appropriate agency for the scene, the purpose, and the agents, is pluralism (local, democratic, student-centered, flexible). Teaching and learning cannot be bureaucratic and mechanical. His effort is to maintain agent and purpose in what he sees as an otherwise technocratic world of tests and measurement.
Is the public invited to inquiry? In some sense, yes: Bracey offers readers a portrait of people with purposes and qualities. But Bracey’s main effort is to rebut claims of educational failure through the citation and critique of research. In other words, Bracey is fighting over which agency is the right one for the scene. Who has professional standing to define the goals and measures of education? In this argument, I couldn’t find any narrative, scene, or teacher/student experience. Bracey does invite audiences to stop being cowed by claims of crisis, and there is the appeal to the public good of democracy, but Bracey’s argument is largely a defense of educational expertise. It exhorts audiences to “trust our agency, not [the CCSI’s].” As a drama, the argument is agent-agency; Bracey discusses agents and their purposes, but only insofar as they can deliver the appropriate agency. Overall, the site of inquiry is to be in the profession; the public’s job is to assent to their status as the guardians of public values. What does this evaluation mean? I understand Bracey’s argument as modeling a form of public engagement for literacy educators, and this model does not seem to call for public inquiry so much as public assent. Again, this evaluation is not a dismissal, but I believe educators could adapt Bracey’s argument to engage a broader audience by inviting public inquiry into acts of teaching and learning. This sort of inquiry could reveal the need for the perspectives he advances mostly on the basis of professional authority. For example, educators might ask parents and administrators for examples of times they or their kids have been challenged to develop resilience. In what scenes did this take place? With whom, for what purpose, using what means? This sort of inquiry can help public audiences focus on the complexity of their own or their kids’ experience and displace the conventionalized (and abstracted) debate over whether the educational system is failing. This inquiry into their own or their kids’ experiences can also help audiences appreciate the
centrality of engagement in teaching and learning. In short, this adaptation of Bracey might make it possible to advance values like the NCTE’s, but through public inquiry rather than through appeals to professional authority.

Mike Rose’s *Why School?: Reclaiming Education for All of Us* (2009) argues for a different discourse of school, or an agency more fitting to the purpose of our society. Rose’s drama is agency-purpose: if we talk about school in broader ways, we’ll support a society in which there is a greater possibility for democratic life. The drama then forwards agents and scenes (stories, details of experience) to create a more appropriate agency (discourse) so that we can fulfill our national purpose (democratic relationship to each other). His hope is that a focus on specific acts of teaching and learning will reveal multiple purposes, agents, agencies—and disrupt the conventional talk of school (competitiveness, standards, measuring up) with the realities of experience (people acting, with purpose, in specific contexts). The hope for a more capacious language is also a hope for a more encompassing democratic and civic life, one that accounts for agents and purpose, not only scene and agency. We can reach a more democratic and ethical life, Rose argues, through deliberation on concrete specifics, not through appeals to abstractions.

Yet it is abstractions about economics and competition, Rose insists, that dominate public discourse about education. Rose is concerned that such abstractions deflect public attention from education as access to opportunity for all students (16-17). We have the wrong agency: we need a “fresh language” about schooling, not just about economics, accountability, compliance, and competitiveness but about personal dreams and democratic aspiration as well (25). Rose worries that the narrowing of our discourse prevents us from seeing schools in relationship to other public institutions (27) and structural issues like
poverty (28). Thus, “we need public talk that links education to a more decent, thoughtful, open society” (28-29). To fix the agency, Rose suggests, we need to inquire into the specifics of the classroom (98). This sort of inquiry can support a better way to talk about teaching and learning: “Public education demands a capacious critique, one that encourages both dissent and invention, anger and hope. We need an expanded vocabulary, adequate both to the daily joy and the daily sorrow of our public schools. And we are in desperate need of rich, detailed images of possibility” (152). In Rose’s argument, the public good can be found once we inquire into concrete experiences. The culture wars over schools miss the purpose and vision of public education that is visible from the perspective of everyday detail and experience in classrooms (153). A revitalized sense of public life and public education can come from inquiry into the daily process of teaching and learning. When we do this, Rose argues, we can appreciate the promise of public education.

This sense of the possible emerges when a child learns to take another child seriously, learns to think something through with other children, learns about perspective and the range of human experience and talent. It comes when, over time, a child arrives at an understanding of number, or acquires skill in rendering an idea in written language. It is there when a group of students crowd around a lab table trying to figure out why a predicted reaction fizzled. When a local event or regional dialect or familiar tall tale becomes a creative resource for visual art or spoken word. When a developing athlete plants the pole squarely in the box and vaults skyward. When a student says that his teacher ‘coaxes our thinking along.’ When a teacher, thinking back on it all, muses on the power of ‘watching your students at such an important time in their lives encounter the world.’ It is in such moments—moments in public school classrooms—that something of immense promise for the nation is being confirmed. (158)

Public school is understood as creating these moments in a common space, committing to them as a public good, and affirming the capacity in all of us; “such a mass public endeavor creates a citizenry” (159).
Overall, Rose argues that without a more appropriate discourse of teaching and learning, we will have no concept of educational opportunity or democratic possibility either. Is the public invited to define the goals and measures of literacy education? Yes, in the sense that we are advised to begin with concrete experience if we want to think about public school and its effectiveness. Rose provides the story of Anthony, for whom school is a source of opportunity, aspiration, and human connection (1-4). Rose also highlights his own high school teacher (14) and a first-grade class in Baltimore (38). Rose uses these stories to define the purpose of teaching and learning (education is for democratic equality of opportunity), but for audiences who don’t already accept his terms, I’m not sure there’s room for much discussion. Again, is the public really invited into inquiry? In a way, yes: Rose models inquiry into acts of teaching and learning, but Rose’s inquiry begins from a small and already-defined set of acts. Instead, Rose begins from his own definitions of the scene and the purpose of education. This beginning point, however, does not seem like a viable invitation to dialogue for groups like the CCSI (or for that matter, for conservatives) opposed to these definitions of the scene (poverty) or the purpose (opportunity). Again, my purpose in this analysis of Rose is not to dismiss his argument or motives; in fact, I identify most strongly with Rose’s call for a focus on educational experience instead of abstractions. Educators seeking to adapt Rose’s argument for local contexts and audiences can invite even more public inquiry into acts. For example, educators seeking to shift parents’ or administrators’ focus from abstractions about competition to concrete experiences can ask audiences to describe a situation in which they or their kids experienced education as access to opportunity. In what situations did this occur? With or for whom? For what purpose? Using what means? What actually happened? Answers to these questions can shift the
discourse from scene and agency to concrete agents and purpose, revealing the diversity of
teaching and learning experience and building a critique of sweeping perspectives on
education like "skills for competitiveness." While Rose already offers readers some examples
of educational images of possibility, educators can help audiences contemplate possibility in
their own or their kids’ experiences by sponsoring inquiry into specific acts. As with Darling-
Hammond, Zhao, and Bracey, I believe educators can extend Rose’s argument on
educational opportunity by inviting public participation in debate.

Unlike Darling-Hammond, Zhao, Bracey, and Rose, Tony Wagner’s *The Global
Achievement Gap* (2008) enacts a drama that questions teacher professionalism. Wagner’s
drama begins with the scene of the flat world and schools not changing to meet it (xvi). We
need the right agency, which for Wagner are the skills he calls critical thinking and problem
solving (14+), collaboration across networks and leading by influence (22+), agility and
adaptability (30+), initiative and entrepreneurialism, effective oral and written
communication (34+), accessing and analyzing information, and curiosity and imagination
(38+). How can we implement the correct agency? Not just through standards and
assessment, Wagner argues (63); testing isn’t the answer, either (90); we need development
for teachers, from teacher education to time to talk. The problem, in Wagner’s view, is that
teachers don’t see the urgency for changes in their development. In other words, we have the
right agency, we just don’t have the right agents, so we need to replace them with people
who sense the urgency of change (223).

On the whole, the drama is focused on agents as the application of agency. But,
recognizing that he does not control the agency (policy), Wagner calls for public inquiry and
critique as a method of change. Wagner proposes an agent-centered process (public inquiry)
for an agency-centered proposal (adopting a redefined set of skills). In other words, he wants audiences to inquire into educational policy in order to arrive at support for his proposal of the seven survival skills for the 21st century. Is public inquiry invited? Yes, but as I’ve pointed out, the questions Wagner poses are more elaborated than the basic “students read, write, speak, listen” of my proposal. For example: “

Above all else, what I have come to understand in this work is that powerful questions are what drive real learning and that such learning is a precondition for lasting change (emphasis in the original). Following are some of the essential questions that we all need to explore together in every school and every community, in every state house and department of education, in Congress, and in our national educational organizations:

In light of the fundamental changes that have taken place in our society in the last twenty-five years, what does it mean to be an educated adult in the twenty-first century? What do we think all high school graduates need to know and be able to do to be well-prepared for college, careers, and citizenship? And since we can’t teach everything, what is most important?

How might our definition of academic rigor need to change in the age of the information explosion?

What are the best ways to know whether students have mastered the skills that matter most? How do we create a better assessment and accountability system that gives us the information we need to ensure that all students are learning essential skills?

What do we need to do in our schools to motivate students to be curious and imaginative, and to enjoy learning for its own sake? How do we ensure that every student has an adult advocate in his or her school who knows the student well?

How do we both support our educators and hold them more accountable for results? What changes are needed in how educators are trained, how they work together in schools, and how they are supervised and evaluated in order to enable them to continuously improve?

What do good schools look like—schools where all students are mastering the skills that matter most? How are they different from the schools we have, and what can we learn from them? (269-70)

I cite this material to show that Wagner’s drama is mixed. While the policy proposal is certainly agency-driven, the process he envisions for change is more rounded: there are
agents with purpose in a variety of situations. Where is the public in this process? Wagner envisions them deliberating, but not necessarily defining the goals and measures of teaching and learning. Wagner’s done that already through his drama of scene (global competition) determining the agency (the seven skills). There is some agent-centered process here, but it is largely to spread Wagner’s ideas.

What is the point of this assessment? My argument here is that Wagner seeks public participation, but he invites it at the level of policy abstractions, not at the level of acts and experience (as Rose does). I believe Wagner’s concept of the public is mixed. On the one hand, he wants members of communities to inquire and deliberate, but on the other, he wants to limit this inquiry to the constructs he provides (what it means to be an educated adult in the 21st century; what academic rigor means in the information age; how student mastery can be measured; and so on). Educators seeking to adapt Wagner’s argument could complement his approach by inviting public audiences to begin with inquiry into their own or their children’s experiences. When they have written effectively (one of Wagner’s “seven essential survival skills for the 21st century”), for what purposes did they write? Using what means? In what scenes? With whom or for whom? With this basis in experience I believe Wagner’s call for public inquiry can move beyond abstractions and delve into the diversity of experience. Uncovering this diversity (all the purposes, scenes, agents, agents, and acts involved in “writing effectively”) has the potential to shift discussion from the flat world of competition to the specific ways that teachers and students already work to develop effective communication; this discussion also has the potential to broaden the concept of “effectiveness” from competition to all the purposes for which students (or parents) read,
write, speak, and listen. Broadly speaking, I see potential for educators to sponsor public inquiry around Wagner's argument.

Like Wagner, Ronald Wolk's *Wasting Minds* (2011) enacts an agent-agency drama that questions professionalism. The scene is one of educational decline, and the appropriate agency to reverse this decline is not coming from professional educators. The appropriate agency, Wolk argues, can be delivered through the means of other agents—alternative schools that can prepare citizens to participate in a vigorous democracy. Wolk is convinced that the need for educational redesign (10) should take precedence over stakeholders' (teachers and administrators) insistence on protecting “their routines, their status, and their turf” (11). Yet for Wolk, the appropriate agency is not the conventional deregulationist proposal of standards, accountability, and testing. Wolk argues that “get tough policy” misses the real reason for poor performance, which is poverty (17); likewise, common standards ignore diversity and students’ motivation (34). Instead, personalization is necessary to mine student interest and engagement (102, 117), and multiple measures of real work are needed rather than standardized tests (128). Wolk concludes that “innovative” schools are capable of personalization while public schools cannot change.

Is the public invited into inquiry? Not to define the goals and measures of literacy education. Wolk invites inquiry into and critique of dominant assumptions in educational reform, but he relies almost entirely on professional rather than public authority. There’s not a publicly accessible inquiry and critique of dominant assumptions, at least not of the kind I’ve described, which begins with acts and branches out from them to reveal the scenes, agency, acts, purposes involved in students’ literacy experiences. Instead, I read Wolk as relying on broad scene-agency dramas like the following:
It is no exaggeration to say that our government is in some peril. A democratic government by definition depends on a well-informed citizenry—perhaps now more than ever. How can we serve as an example to the world of individual liberties if we compromise our values? How do we preserve human rights and civil liberties if we are ignorant of the Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution? How can we have a government “by the people,” if too many people do not have informed opinions or are too apathetic to express them?

In terms of drama, we must have the agents we need, with the right agency and the right purpose, for the scene. And how are we going to get these agents? By applying the right agency. Here is Wolk’s problem, in my analysis. If this is a call to the public, it doesn’t tell public audiences what they can do. All they can do—their role—is to assent to expert authority. In other words, for the good of democracy, assent to professional authority. Those leaders who would make these decisions are reminded of their role in preparation for democratic participation, but they are not exhorted to talk to and/or listen to the desires of people outside their circles of practice. Overall, I read this drama as one of agent-agency: it remains a contest of professional authority. And, its approach still lacks the invitation to inquiry that might engage a broad range of audiences.

My assessment here is an attempt to understand the role of the public imagined in Wolk’s argument. As an argument on reform, I see Wolk’s position as interesting and challenging exactly because it upsets conventionalized communication. Yet Wolk’s drama fails to offer public audiences a role beyond assenting to expert authority. As above, I imagine educators can adapt Wolk’s approach to invite public participation in defining the goals and measures of literacy education. For example, educators can ask parents and administrators to describe situations in which teachers have successfully mined student interest through personalization. What was the situation? Who was involved? What means were employed? What did people actually do? Answers to these sorts of questions can bring
discussion of “personalization” (Wolk’s policy solution) to a concrete level; moreover, at this level of discussion, it may be possible to identify effective practices of personalization happening among professional educators. This sort of inquiry can still draw on Wolk’s argument—the need for personalization in literacy education—but reframe it to de-emphasize the struggle between disciplinary-professional and alternate sources of educational expertise.

CONCLUSION

My analysis suggests that all of these educators are working with a variation on agency- and agent-centered drama. For Darling-Hammond, the agency must become less transmission-oriented. For Zhao, the agency must be pluralism and diversification. For Bracey, the agency must be engagement, not accountability. For Rose, the agency must be a language sufficient to the range of purposes for education, not merely the competitive element. Wagner also agrees that the world has changed; the agency must be new skills, and to deliver new skills, we must change control of schools. Wolk’s agency must be alternative schools that implement his suggestions and values.

In each argument, these agencies are linked to specific agents: for Darling-Hammond, professional educators are required to fulfill our commitment to equity. Likewise, Zhao’s agents of pluralism are professional educators. Bracey’s agents are those who engage students and focus on the qualities he describes—again, professional educators. Likewise, Rose’s agents are public educators. Wagner’s agents are public citizens of all types. Wolk’s agents are those attracted to education but usually those coming from outside the disciplines and professions.
In these dramas, the agents fulfill a broader purpose. For Darling-Hammond, the agents share a commitment to equity. For Zhao, agents uphold an American spirit of innovation amidst diversity. For Bracey, educators work to develop citizens with specific qualities. For Rose, educators seek to restore a sense of public opportunity and possibility in education rather than limits and failures. Wagner's agents provide access to higher level academics, jobs, and citizenship. Wolk's agents prepare students for democratic engagement.

As I've suggested above, the missing term in these dramas typically is acts of teaching and learning. In Darling-Hammond's drama, for example, the closest we get to act is the contrasting portrait of a classroom in Singapore and a school in California (6-7), but this portrait contrasts agents and scene, not act and act. Zhao forwards an elementary school talent show (46) to demonstrate that students invest themselves despite a "lack of standards," but there is very little portrait of what students and teachers actually do. Bracey's drama features no acts of teaching and learning at all. Rose pays more attention to act; there's Anthony, learning to read about drugs so he can talk to his daughter, advance his career prospects, and learn (1-4). There's also Rose's own teacher who engaged him (14) and a first-grade class in Baltimore (38). Yet while Rose forwards these acts of teaching and learning, his inquiry into them is relatively brief. That is, Rose forwards these acts to affirm his educational values and doesn't consider the ways that the acts exceed his values. In other words, Rose models a form of inquiry into act that stops when it confirms his definition of the scene and the purpose of education. Wagner's acts are relatively few. We are told a CEO is looking for employees who can ask good questions while that CEO's child gets in trouble for posing challenging questions in school (1). Similarly, we meet an MIT professor whose child's experiences in school prove good for inquiry but bad for testing (7). These acts of
teaching and learning, however, are so stylized to support his point—that schools get in the
way of good learning—that most of the acts are invisible. Wolk’s acts include a student
whose “brilliant” essay fails the NY Regents’ exam because it doesn’t follow the letter of the
instructions (43) as well as Wolk’s own English teacher (54), a teacher who won’t read
because she’s too busy (61), and a teacher finding no room for meaningful projects in her
curriculum (127). But as in Wagner’s drama above, Wolk’s acts offer little detail of teaching
and learning. What is actually happening in the writing and the classes described? We can’t
tell because Wolk’s scenes are crafted to make an easy point: teachers aren’t professionals,
testing is empty, teachers are vital in kids’ lives, we overcrowd teaching with mandates.

My point is that inquiry into acts of teaching and learning is under-explored in these
arguments. There’s not a lot of room for act, I argue, because the writers are trying to enact
agent-agency dramas, and act is too complex: it introduces an agent, with purpose(s), in
specific context(s), in interaction with other agents, employing a range of agencies. When
these writers’ dramas avoid act, they depend on the audience being willing to accept and
share their concept of the scene (either as the flat, competitive world or as a diverse,
changing place), the agency (centralization and standardization or professionalist pluralism),
and the purpose (competition or democratic participation). I don’t see these arguments as re-
opening dialectic. Instead, they seem to reinforce the conventionalized dramas of policy
debates. Even a focus on agents and purpose as in Zhao or Rose, which would seem like a
counterstatement to the scene-agency domination of debate, ends up modeling a form of
public engagement very similar to Darling-Hammond’s: that is, uphold teachers’ standing if
you want to uphold democracy.
What might realist drama look like in these arguments? I’m suggesting that it might look like a combination of two parts. First, Rose argues that we need to root the discourse of education in concrete specifics (16). If we inquire into acts of teaching and learning, we will develop the agency we need—a language adequate to the scene and the act (98). Second, Wagner argues that we need public inquiry into teaching and learning (269), something “driven by inquiry rather than ideology” (271). A combination of these approaches resembles what I’ve been proposing: educators, seeking to invite public participation in education debate, need to enact realist dramas—focused on acts of teaching and learning—in order to sponsor the processes of inquiry, critique, recalcitrance, and maturation. But, I’m not convinced that beginning with policy questions, as Wagner does, can bring about the full dialectic of a more act-based drama. The drama I propose allows competing groups to inquire into acts and illustrate the diversity of possible perspectives on acts. I find inquiry into acts a acceptable approach because audiences don’t have to agree on definitions of purpose, scene, and agency. My hope is that inquiry into acts will help public audiences assess conventionalized communication, suggest more sufficient terms, and advance a more capacious discourse of teaching and learning.

**CONCLUSION BY EXAMPLE**

I want to offer an example of the kind of public engagement I have been discussing. Around the same time that I began this project, I also began an interview study in a local context. Maja Wilson and I had heard that Linda Rief, a leader in language-arts education, was asking questions similar to the ones posed in this dissertation (that is, what is the relationship between her disciplinary-professional values and public participation in defining the goals and measures of literacy education?). Linda has been de-emphasizing grades in her
eighth-grade English classes for the past 30 years. She is required to give semester grades, but several times a year, she sends home a binder with drafts and revisions, her written responses to this work, and a letter to parents describing each child’s progress and challenges. Linda asks parents to read and discuss this work with their children. But Linda was starting to wonder if parents valued these artifacts and descriptions of learning. She confided to me and Maja in 2009 that she’d spent hours writing letters the year before and had heard only four responses from parents: all of them inquiries about grades. Maja and I decided to investigate. Did parents of Linda’s students really just want to know the grade? Was Linda’s method of assessment and attempt to communicate with parents worth the effort? The question behind our inquiry dealt with professionalism and public participation: should Linda stop doing what she believes in because of a sense that parents don’t support it?

As I look back on this dissertation and the interview study with parents, I can see now how they were connected. When Maja and I first proposed the study, we called it “The Rhetoric of Literacy Instruction.” We assumed that parents were using commonplaces of national education debate in their critiques of Linda’s practice (needing to know “where kids stand,” wanting “standards” or “rigor”). Maja and I wanted to understand parents’ discourse and find ways of assessing it against the realities of students’ experiences using and learning literacy. In this dissertation, I have relied on inquiry into acts of teaching and learning to break up abstractions about “international competitiveness” and “school reform.” In our study, Maja and I used a similar strategy. We began conversation by asking parents to talk about their own experiences of learning to read and write, inside and outside of school. What were your parents’ roles? What experiences can you remember? What experiences did you have with teachers? Once parents had the chance to describe their experiences, we asked
about their children’s experiences learning to read and write inside and outside of school. What are their key experiences? What kinds of relationships with teachers have been essential? What does your child like to do now? Finally, we asked parents how teachers have communicated with them about their children’s learning. What forms does this communication take, and which do you appreciate most? How has communication with teachers changed over time? What kinds of conversation do you have with other parents about your communication with teachers?

This sequence of questions may seem like an indirect way of getting at what parents “want” with grades, assessment, and communication. But we found that this sequence disrupted most parents’ desire to go straight for a position statement on grading and assessment. By beginning with their own experiences, we encouraged parents to reflect on their needs as developing readers and writers (as well as on the role of writing in their lives now). We found that parents—even those who would say they wanted number grades for the purpose of ranking and comparing their children—were willing to explore their own literacy education backgrounds; more to the point, we found parents spending the most time talking about teachers who had engaged them by creating space for their interests. Then, when we shifted to a discussion of their children’s’ literacy education experiences, we found parents ready to discuss how they and teachers had engaged their children as readers and writers. Again, the central experiences were ones in which students had an opportunity to explore purpose: to write with and for people they cared about; to discuss topics they chose; to use their own language; and so on. But parents didn’t describe these kinds of literacy education experiences in terms of position statements (as in, “we support student-centered pedagogy”); they told stories of what their children did. Here is the overlap between this dissertation and
this interview study. By inviting parents to focus on experiences of teaching and learning, we created an opportunity for inquiry into act. Parents found themselves looking at what their children did and do, not in the language of position statements ("my kids need grades so I know where they stand") but in the service of a narrative. I believe these parents had the opportunity to do what I’ve been arguing for in this project, which is to inquire into acts and define the goals and measures of teaching and learning. By the time we shifted from their children’s literacy education experiences to modes of communication between school and home, parents had already made a strong case. What matters in school-home communication is a portrait of what students are doing, how teachers are responding, and how students are working with guidance. By the time we asked about what parents valued most, they had already spent half of the interview talking about the kinds of communication they had valued over the years. In the terms of this project, Maja and I had found a way to displace the conventionalized perspective ("I need grades to know where my child stands"), but not through position statements of our own professional expertise ("narrative assessment is superior to numerical assessment"). Rather, we created an opportunity for parents to inquire into their experience and their children’s in order to discover what they cared about most.

I should emphasize that Maja and I did not find parents already supportive of Linda’s practice. At the outset of the interviews, a few of the parents explicitly stated their desire to know grades for the purpose of ranking and comparing. Moreover, a few of the parents openly questioned Linda’s judgment on matters of assessment and grading. Instead of concluding that these parents would continue to resist Linda’s practice, we decided to test what some of these parents were saying. Were they drawing on commonplaces from national debate discourse when they said “I need to know where my child stands”? And did this kind
of statement mean that parents did not support Linda’s practice? Maja and I weren’t sure, but we had a sense that parents’ desires were more complicated than what they said. As we discovered through the interviews, what parents “wanted” changed during the course of conversation. Parents who began the interview saying they wanted to know where their children stood in the class rankings also spent the most time talking about opportunities they had over the years to see their children’s work, teachers’ responses, and their children’s revision. Maja and I had hoped to see this kind of movement: we had hoped that inquiry into acts of teaching and learning would disrupt the quick position statements about grades and prompt more adequate terms for what they valued in their children’s literacy education.

What does this example from our interview study suggest? I take the interview study as an example of how educators (in our case, graduate students) can practice public professionalism. The most powerful case for narrative and descriptive assessment turned out to be the narratives that parents created of their own experiences and of their children’s experiences. Parents convinced themselves of the need for progressive language arts pedagogy (like that advocated by the NCTE) through inquiry into acts of teaching and learning. Parents also gained the sense of a need for teacher judgment in context, but they didn’t arrive at this acknowledgment because educators had asserted their professional standing. Rather, parents found themselves embracing Linda’s practice because they were willing to suspend their conventional position statements on grading and re-shape their beliefs through a process of inquiry.

As I write this section, I can see similarities between this interview study and Mike Rose’s *Why School?* We’re looking to create what Rose calls “images of possibility” (152) in progressive literacy education classrooms. But, in Maja’s and my case, we’re inviting parents
to inquire into acts they choose rather than to accept our representative anecdotes of acts of
teaching and learning. That is, parents get to supply their own cases whereas Rose asks
readers to accept the cases he forwards. I believe this difference matters. The case Maja and I
ended up making with these parents is not complete, but it is based in these parents’
experiences. This inquiry began with their children and wasn’t generalized in the service of a
broader argument ("we need descriptive, narrative assessment of reading and writing" or "we
need teacher judgment in context to engage students"). Rather, we offered parents the
opportunity to open inquiry in a safe setting. I find act a simple and publicly accessible way
to confront parents (or others) with the complexity of teaching and learning. But does inquiry
into act scale up? I believe the kind of public engagement Maja and I undertake in our study
is a viable method of unsettling commonplaces with parents. But what about on a national
scale? Is there an act-based inquiry the NCTE can adopt for its national message? I’m not
sure written arguments capture the experience of the conversations Maja and I had with
parents. I’m also unsure parents would feel the sense of ownership they did with us when
reading a representative anecdote of someone else’s child (or of a stylized composite case).
What is a group like the NCTE to do with the argument of this dissertation? I’m not sure how
national advocacy can work, but I am more confident about local engagement like the kind
Maja and I experienced. I am also more confident in literacy educators’ access to
engagement with parents. In the end of this project, I arrive at the same conclusion as Linda
Adler-Kassner in *The Activist WPA*: “story-changing work is most effectively enacted at the
local level” (184). While this dissertation began with national debate discourse and critical
disciplinary conversations as the central "locations," my inquiry will likely become most
useful at the capillary level of educational debate: how can educators work in their local
communities to respond effectively to arguments like the CCSI's? Of course, there is the matter of national advocacy and groups like the NCTE. It is possible that an inquiry-driven rhetoric like the one I've developed here is not viable for national education debate. Even if so, I hope that my inquiry can become useful for the majority of educators who work daily with local publics—parents, administrators, fellow teachers, partnering universities, and so on. In a way, then, this project embraces the goal of Linda Flower's *Community Literacy*: the goal of inquiry is to create a counterpublic (68). In this project, I have used Prelli, Anderson, and Althouse's term "zone of recalcitrance" instead of counterpublic, but the goal here is the same. My hope is for public inquiry to create local resistances to the dominant discourse of international competitiveness—or whatever comes next.
WORKS CITED


