

**Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Reading and Writing
Positively Affect Student Reading and Writing Results?**

Susan O. Stevens

University of New England

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Abstract

This study researches the challenges of instituting the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in a fairly low-achieving 6th grade class in an international/American school in Costa Rica. The research is focused on the facets of close reading and argument writing that are part of the CCSS and which have not often been taught at the elementary or middle school level. A hybrid philosophy of teaching argument reading was adopted—one that includes both the cognitive philosophy and the social philosophy as recommended by Newell et al. (2011). *Teaching Argument for Critical Thinking and Writing: An Introduction* (Hillocks, 2012) was the foundational text used. The results were positive. Students grew in their stamina for close reading, in their ability to collaboratively and individually make meaning in complex texts, and in their ability to write arguments—both technically and holistically.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	2
Introduction.....	5
Rationale.....	5
Literature Review.....	9
Common Core State Standards.....	9
The text complexity issue.....	10
The Common Core, critical thinking skills and argument writing.....	13
Philosophies of Teaching Argument Reading and Writing.....	14
Cognitive philosophy.....	15
Social philosophy.....	16
Principles for Teaching Argument Reading and Writing.....	17
Methodology.....	20
Introduction.....	20
Research Design.....	20
Interventions.....	22
Respondent group.....	23
Data Collection Plan.....	24
How data was obtained.....	25
Time line.....	26
Data Validity Analysis.....	25
Credibility.....	26
Transferability.....	26
Dependability.....	26
Audit trail.....	27
Confirmability.....	27
Results.....	28
Findings.....	27
Argument reading.....	27
Argument writing.....	34
Student Self-Assessment.....	36

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Discussion.....	37
Reading results.....	37
Writing results.....	39
Student self-assessment survey.....	41
Student self-assessment of improvement.....	41
Research questions.....	43
Action Plan.....	45
Rationale.....	45
Conclusion	49
References.....	52
Appendices.....	56
Appendix A: Beginning of the Year Reading Survey.....	56
Appendix B: TCR&WP 6 th Grade Performance Assessment.....	57
Appendix C: Vocabulary-in-Context Test.....	71
Appendix D: Scoring Sample	75
Appendix E: Sample Growth in Revision.....	76
Appendix F: Holistic Critical Thinking Rubric	79
Appendix G: Argument Reading & Writing Post Intervention Survey.....	82
Appendix H: 6-Point 3-12 Writer's Rubric.....	84

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

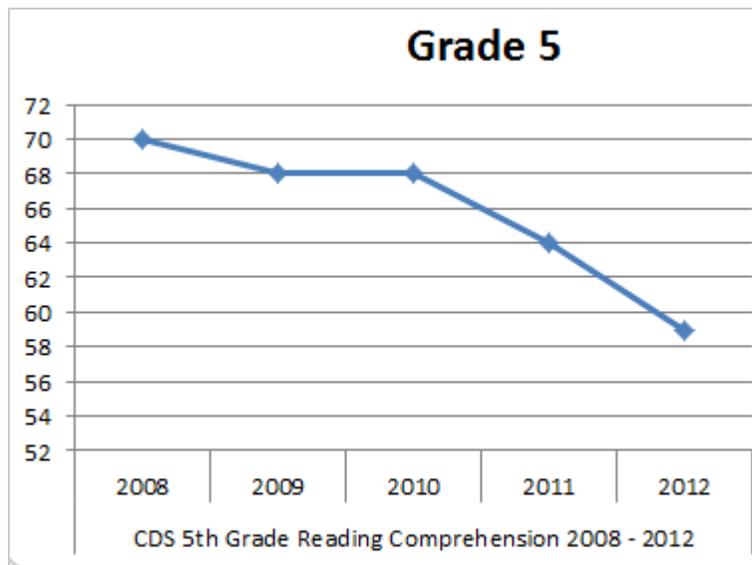
Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Student Reading and Writing Results?

Introduction

Rationale

Country Day School, a private school in the suburbs of San Jose, Costa Rica, has experienced a steady downward trend of 5th grade Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) reading comprehension scores over the last five years, as can be seen in Fig. 1.

Figure 1. ITBS 5th Grade Scores in Reading



As a result, incoming 6th grade students struggle with their comprehension of literature and non-fiction at the 6th grade level—books that were chosen at the pre-Common Core State Standard (CCSS) 6th grade level, such as *The Lightning Thief*

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

(Fountas and Pinnell level S and Lexile® level 740). The Lexile® band for 6th – 8th grade under the Common Core Standards is 925–1185 according to the Lexile® Framework for Reading site (2012). The writing skills of the incoming 6th grade students are also at a fairly low level, as indicated by initial writing assignments graded using Northwest Education’s 6 + 1 Traits® Scoring Guide (2010). After seven years of scoring the twice-yearly 6 + 1 Traits® school-wide writing assessments, the teacher-researcher is confident in her assessment that at least one-third of this class is writing at the 3rd – 4th grade level.

30 % of Country Day students come from the United States, 30% are from Costa Rica, and 40% are from many other countries (MacGilpin, 2012). Approximately 99% of the students are from high socio-economic status (HSES) households, and many are English Language Learners (ELL). The specific make-up of Mrs. Stevens’ class is approximately 20% from the United States, 36% from Costa Rica, and 40% from other countries. Her class was evenly divided between female and male students.

The beginning-of-the-year Reading Attitude Survey (Appendix A) and observations by the teacher-researcher demonstrated that a few students loved to read, the majority of students considered reading a chore, and two students “hated” reading and were not willing to give up that position.

The students in Mrs. Stevens’ 6th grade language arts classes were given the 6th grade Common-Core-Aligned Performance Assessment (Appendix B) created by the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project Group (TCR&WP, 2010) in August 2012. This assessment measures argument-reading comprehension using the students’ ability to

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

summarize (identify the central idea apart from personal opinion, identify key details that support the central idea, and cite evidence from the article/viewing). Students summarize a short video on the topic of animals in the classroom, and then summarize two articles—one for and the other against having animals in the classroom. The assessment measures argument writing by means of an argument letter to the principal, which either makes a claim for or against having animals in the classroom. The rubric measures the ability to make a claim, organize the support, extend the claim, and write a closing that relates to the claim, as well as use citations from the articles to strengthen the claims (2010). Students see the rubric before the assessment begins.

One hundred percent of Mrs. Stevens' students scored at least one "1" (using a 4-point rubric) for their summary writing and 80% of the students scored at least one "1" on the essay writing portion of the performance assessment (also on a 4-point scale). Thus, students had a need to improve in their argument reading and writing skills—which is a new focus of the Common Core Language Arts Standards (2010). This data both demonstrates a need for intervention and provides baseline data for the action research.

Administrative Support

The administration at Country Day School is supportive of reflective teaching, which is the essence of action research. There are no administrative or institutional roadblocks to this research. According to the middle school principal, no parent permission slips are needed as students are not losing any instructional time and students will remain anonymous. In fact, administration is quite interested in viewing the results of this research when completed.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Table 2. Student Results on TCR&WP Pre-Assessment

	Teachers' College Reading & Writing Project Common-Core-Aligned Performance Assessment																					
	Video					Reading										Writing						
	Central Idea	Details	Cite	Total	Scaled Score	Should You have animals?					Leave Animals Out					VOCAB	Argument Essay					
					Central Idea	Details	Cite	Total	Scaled Score	Central Idea	Details	Cite	Total	Scaled Score	/12	Intro. Concl.	Organiza- tion	Elabora- tion	Craft	Total	Scaled Score	
Student A	2	2.5	2	6.5	2	1	2	1	4	1	3	1	1	5	2	11	1	2	1	3	7	2
Student B	2	1	2	5	2	1	1	2	4	1	1	1	1	3	1	7	2	2	1	2	7	2
Student C	3	3	3	9	3	2	3	3	8	3	3	1	1	5	2	11	3	3	2	3	11	3
Student D	2	2	2	6	2	1	3	3	7	2	2	1	1	4	1	9	3	2	1	3	9	2
Student E	3	2	1	6	2	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	3	1	10	1	1	2	1	5	1
Student F	1	1	2	4	1	1	3	2	6	2	1	1	1	3	1	9	3	2	2	2	9	2
Student G	2	1	2	5	2	1	3	2	6	2	1	1	1	3	1	11	3	1	1	1	6	2
Student H	3	2	1	6	2	1	3	2	6	2	1	1	1	3	1	10	2.5	2	1.5	2	8	2
Student I	3	3	1	7	2	1	3	3	7	2	3	1	1	5	2	12	2	2	3	1	8	2
Student J	1	1	1	3	1	1	3	1	5	2	1	1	1	3	1	10	2	2	1	2	7	2
Student K	1	1	3	5	2	2	3	2	7	2	2	1	2	5	2	10	1	2	2	2	7	2
Student L	2	1	2	5	2	2	1	2	5	2	1	1	1	3	1	9	1	3	3	1	8	2
Student M	3	1	1	5	2	1	3	1	5	2	1	1	1	3	1	9	3	2	1	1	7	2
Student N	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	3	1	2	1	1	4	1	11	1	1	1	1	4	1
Student O	3	1	2	6	2	2	2	1	5	2	1	1	1	3	1	10	2	3	3	2	10	3
Student P	3	1	1	5	2	1	3	3	7	2	1	1	3	5	2	11	3	3	2	3	11	3
Mean Score	2.19	1.531	1.733	5.406	1.875	1.25	2.375	1.875	5.5	1.8125	1.56	1	1.188	3.75	1.3125	10	2.094	2.0625	1.719	1.875	7.75	2.0625

Statement of Problem

The problem was three-fold: (1) The 6th grade students' reading and writing levels were generally below grade level while at the same time, the recently adopted CCSS required a higher level of reading and writing. (2) The students had no experience in argument reading and writing, which are required by the CCSS. (3) The students demonstrated limited ability in critical thinking skills.

Primary Research Questions

The primary research question was: Can a group of students who have medium to low rankings on the ITBS for students of high socio-economic status be raised to grade level in a fairly short time using the Common Core Standards?

Questions to be kept in mind during the entirety of the project were: Are the students developing critical thinking skills? If not, what more can be done to develop that skill in individual students? Are student arguments of a higher quality than they

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

were previously? Does using the Common Core Standards as a foundation instead of the standards that were previously used at CDS make a difference in student progress?

As head of CCSS implementation and curriculum in the middle school, Mrs. Stevens' hope is that this can serve as a pilot project for the teaching of argument reading and writing at CDS. Although all teachers in the middle school are supposed to be teaching the CCSS, in this and many other international schools there is not a lot of accountability, which results in a practical reality of teachers choosing what and how to teach in the classroom.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis was that all students would emerge from the eight-week study with measurably greater critical thinking skills, close reading skills, argument evaluation abilities, and argument writing skills.

Literature Review

Common Core State Standards

Stepping into readings about the Common Core State Standards is a bit like stepping into the OK Corral—there's a lot of bullet dodging to be done. The debate is growing beyond the borders of the United States, as international/American schools need to make decisions concerning the adoption of the CCSS. Part of the conversation is about the steep continuum of the Common Core—especially in terms of text complexity (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012) which places great demands on students' reading levels—especially English language learners (ELLs) who proliferate at

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

international/American schools. The new Common Core emphasis on argument writing is what gave rise to this study: a dual look at CCSS implementation, especially in an international/American school setting, and, more specifically, a look at teaching argument reading and writing. The literature that includes both topics is lacking.

Only one resource looked at both in a general sense—Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman's *Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement* (2012). This book takes a middle-ground position on the CCSS, pointing out that one can read the standards like a curmudgeon or as if they contain gold (2012). Others are not so balanced.

In a publication of the National Council of English Teachers, Bomer & Maloch state, "In raw terms of what gets taught in American schools, no single national policy event has ever had as much significance as the adoption of these standards" (2011). They point out that the U.S. Congress had little to say about the establishment of the standards, although one might think you would need Congressional approval of a "de facto national curriculum", and that the Common Core Standards, which profess to be research-based, are based on anchor standards, which may not be research-based (Bomer & Maloch, 2011). In addition, Bomer and Maloch question assumptions that "diverse regional and ideological perspectives can be reconciled under a universalized, rationalized curriculum framework" (2011, p. 39), whether the purpose of education is to prepare students for college and careers, whether the backwards design from college readiness and focus on text evidence is appropriate in early childhood education, and also point out many types of literacies that the Common Core does not address such as reflection and social change (2011).

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Kelly Stassi, who points out that the National Council of English Teachers (NCTE) wasn't involved in the creation of the CCSS nor have endorsed them, actually grappled with the ethicality of helping a district adopt the CCSS, as she believes there is a lack of focus on the process of writing and too much focus on “outdated modes” of writing (2011, p. 5). Perhaps a counterargument to her stance would be the time-honored process in art schools of first copying the old masters, then working from life, and finally developing personal style.

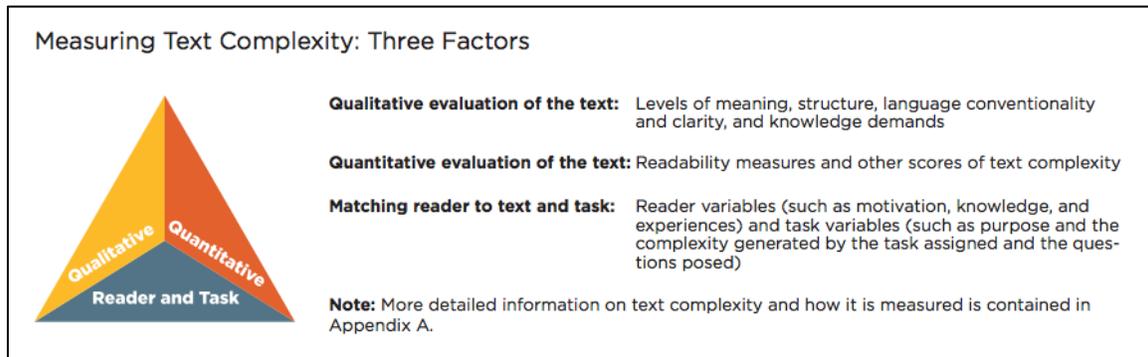
On the other end of the spectrum, Phillips and Wong, who are part of the education team at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which “partnered with the Council of Chief States School Officers and the National Governors Association to develop the Common Core Standards and is investing in its next steps,” (2010) maintain that the CCSS create a “broad-based sharing of what works, but at the same time provide local flexibility as how to teach the core” (2010, p. 38) and are also a “platform for innovation” (2010, p. 38). They applaud the “fewer, clearer, higher” (2010, p. 38) standards of the Common Core.

There *is* research agreement that teachers will need professional development in order to effectively teach argument reading and writing (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012; Sassi, 2011; Newell, Beach, Smith, & VanDerHeide, 2011; Phillips & Wong, 2010)—a mode of writing that moves well beyond persuasive writing, which most of us are accustomed to teaching.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

The text difficulty issue. The increased level of text complexity is another concern for teachers. The Common Core position on text complexity is explained in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Common Core Position on the Determination of Text Complexity



(CCSS, p. 31)

Thankfully, these three factors move determination of readability away from simple word-and-syllable-counting formulas, such as the Lexile® system (MetaMetrics, 2012), toward a more complex evaluation of texts. The Fountas and Pinnell book-leveling system seems to harmonize with the Common Core system of text leveling (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012). Unfortunately, it is limited to kindergarten through eighth grade levels. The sophisticated Coh-Metrix system, which “analyzes text using 60 factors, including syntax, ‘narrativity,’ word abstraction, and ‘cohesion,’ or how well the text makes connections for the reader, facilitating understanding” (Gewertz, 2011, p.4), is sufficiently complex as to be of little practical use in the classroom.

While coping with the text complexity issues in the CCSS, teachers must avoid the tendency to simplify the reading, according to Mary J. Schleppegrell, a linguist and

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

professor of education at the University of Michigan, “Too often, teachers simplify rather than dive deeply into it. On the secondary level, you can’t really make it [the text] simpler and still maintain the level of content. You have to amplify instruction around it” (Gewertz, 2011). One suggestion is repeated readings of short texts to increase understanding of short texts (resource unknown). Another is that students need to “develop tolerance [or stamina] for the intensity of close reading” (Shanahan as cited in Gewertz, 2011, p.5). Barbara Moss suggests creating text sets around theme to help students develop the background knowledge they need for challenging texts (2011). “Grouping texts thematically helps students to: (1) see how information is connected, (2) view information from different lenses, (3) experience a variety of genres, (4) develop domain knowledge critical to comprehension development (Hirsch, 2006), and (5) gain repeated exposures to academic vocabulary” (Moss, 2012, p. 63).

On the other hand, Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman suggest that students read at their level, but that schools institute a policy of accelerating growth up the reading-levels ladder through goal-setting, leveled libraries, and increased time allotted for reading (2012). Gewertz discusses work being done by New York City teachers to assign levels of complexity to texts and assign them to the CCSS grade bands. This work is difficult as is evidenced by teacher disagreement about *Huck Finn*—some teachers believe it appropriate for the 8th grade level and others suggest it is better taught in college (2011).

The CCSS, critical thinking skills, and argument writing. According to Newell et al., “only a fraction of students (i.e., 3% of eighth graders, 6% of 12th graders) can make informed, critical judgments about written text (Perie, Grigg, &

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Donahue, 2005). Only 15% of 12th-grade students performing at the proficient level were able to write well-organized essays in which they took clear positions and consistently supported those positions using transitions to lead the reader from one part of the essay to another (Perie et al., 2005)” (Newell et al., 2011), which indicates the need for the focus on argument writing that is found in the CCSS. The Common Core has “infused more cognitive complexity into the knowledge acquisition process” (Conley, 2011).

Socrates taught that we have a tendency to accept familial or societal norms unless we are challenged through argument (Hillocks, 2011). Hillocks flatly states that “argument is the core of critical thinking” (2011, p. xv). Going even a step further, Alsup et al. said, “Literacy education lies at the center of achieving our stated goals of fostering critical thought, critical dialogue, and a circumspect and vigilant American citizenry . . . and has particular value and potential in a [postmodern] culture increasingly able to distinguish fact from fiction, truth from lies” (2006, 279-281).

Truly, from the sandbox to the grave, argumentation is an important part of living and *successful* argument-making relies on higher-level critical thinking skills and the ability to deal with opposing arguments, which is the core of powerful arguments (Nippold & Ward-Longergan, 2010; Dickson, 2004). Andrews, et al. adds, “Argumentation implies skills of abstraction, conceptualization, and applied logic” (2009, p. 292).

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

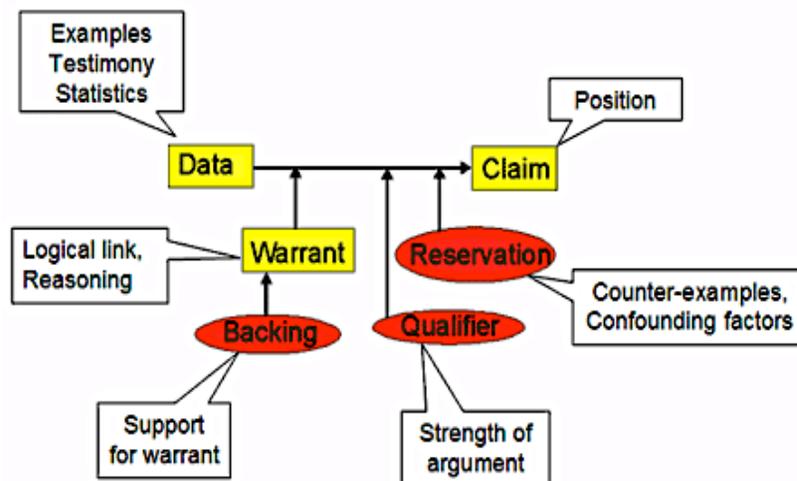
Two argument-reading-specific critical thinking skills that must be taught are 1) applying judgments to what you read according to criteria, and 2) making interpretations and inferences (Hillocks, 2011).

Philosophies of Teaching Argument Reading and Writing

There are two basic philosophies and research perspectives for teaching argument reading and writing: the cognitive camp and the social camp.

Cognitive philosophy. The cognitive philosophy relies on explicit teaching of “rhetorical and logical form” (Newell, et al., 2011), and mostly rises out of the teachings of Aristotle, who created the rhetoric of probability (Hillocks, 2010), and more recently, Toulmin’s model for argument (Hillocks, 2011; Newel, et al., 2011). There is a clear visual representation of Toulmin’s Argument Model in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Visual Representation of Toulmin’s Argument Model



(Anonymous, n.d., <http://goo.gl/WM235>)

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

“70% of the variance in the quality of student essays could be attributed to the use of specific elements of argument as opposed to demographic factors of grade level (i.e., fourth vs. sixth) and disability (learning disabled vs. non-learning disabled)” (Newell, et al., 2011). Some of the cognitively-based research has shown that elaborating student goals is linked to improvement in argument writing as measured by the inclusion of counter-arguments (Newell, et al., 2011). Moreover, tutorials about myside bias (the idea that readers and writers may have a bias so strong that they don’t even stop to consider or include opposing opinions) also increased argument-writing performance (Newell, et al., 2011) due to a greater awareness of the bias.

Social philosophy. Much of the research on the social practices of teaching argument reading and writing mention that Toulmin’s Model is too limiting (Newell, et al., 2011). Teaching pure logic and Toulmin’s model “seem[s] to have little effect in helping students to write logical arguments” (McCann, 2010, p. 34). Conversely, the social philosophy believes that argument as a social practice results in a “snowball phenomenon” related to the ability to argue (Newell, et al., 2011). Even at the 10-year-old level, role-playing can prepare students to write arguments that acknowledge opposite viewpoints (Newell, et al., 2011). However, “Felton and Kuhn [2001] noted that middle school students may not have a clear sense of the differences between the goal of undermining a partner’s argument versus the goal of undermining the partner’s specific claim by seeking clarification of and critiquing it” (Newell, et al., 2011). Perhaps there are developmental issues at work in this issue of identifying with your audience and creating powerful counterarguments that back your claim.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Collaborative reasoning tends to increase the ability to argue logically (Andrews, et al., 2009), and “Michael W. Smith has noted that it is through the daily oral interchanges in grappling with problems and responding to the persistent questions of *Why? So what? and Who says?* that learners begin to recognize and satisfy the requirements of logic” (McCann, 2010). Dickson concurs and further states that debate leads to greater interest in writing about the topic debated (2004). Newell et al. take the argument beyond the classroom and write, “students learn to construct their beliefs, goals, and values through role-playing and dialogue” (2011, p. 292).

Newell, et al., conclude that an integrated approach, which includes both cognitive and social aspects of argument, may be the most productive (2011), and Hillock’s book seems to be the best example of such a hybrid approach found in the literature.

Principles for Teaching Argument Reading and Writing

A list of general guiding principles can be formulated from the literature:

- Stop wasting time in the classroom and engage in purposeful reading, writing, and discussion in the classroom. “Give students an interesting text and a chance to argue about it” (Schmoker, 2009, p. 525);¹
- To learn, students need to experience “flow” (Hillocks, 2011), which involves active learning, discussion, and working on real-world problems

¹ The researcher was compelled to include this quote from Schmoker after seeing a bulletin board outside another 6th grade classroom plastered with coloring book coloring.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

(Hillocks, 2011; McCann, 2010; Nippold & Ward-Lonergan, 2010; Schmoker, 2009);

- Students need larger audiences than their teachers (Newell, et al., 2011);
- Reading and writing are “reciprocal activities, particularly with regard to writing development” (Andrews, et al., 2009, also Newell et al., 2011) and should be taught together;
- Model and explicitly teach repeatedly how to annotate a text and think critically while reading (Schmoker, 2009);
- Use a writing process model (Andrews et al., 2009);
- When working on new and challenging writing, make the other aspects of writing less challenging (Calkins et al., 2012); and
- Integrate the cognitive and social theories of argumentation (Newell et al., 2011) in instruction.

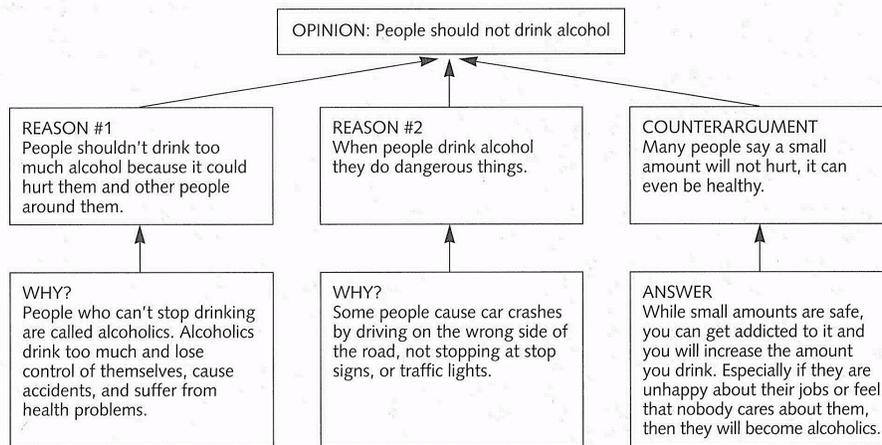
Principles that are more specific to argument reading and writing that arise out of the literature are:

- Create units around big ideas or concepts such as love and justice (Hillocks, 2011);
- Move up on a continuum of argument difficulty, such as arguments of fact followed by creating criterion for arguments of judgment, making arguments of judgment, then arguments of policy, etc. (Hillocks, 2011);
- Begin with data, not creation of a claim or thesis (Hillocks, 2011);

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

- Provide explicit goals, such as “a statement of their belief, two or three reasons for their belief, examples of supporting information, two or three reasons why others might disagree, and why those reasons were wrong” (Andrews et al., 2009, p. 296);
- Teach students to collaborate, as collaboration leads to more elaborate justifications and reasons (Newell, et al., 2011; Moss, 2012);
- Develop heuristics, or scaffolds, such as outlines and graphic organizers, as many students benefit from them (Andrews et al., 2009; Nippold & Ward-Lonergan, 2010; Newell, et al., 2011). Examples of heuristics that are helpful, but not prescriptive are found in Dickson’s article (2004, p. 37) (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Example of an Experimental Student’s Pyramid (with corrected spelling)



Yeh (59). Copyright 1998 by the National Council of Teachers of English. Reprinted with permission.

(Dickson, 2004, p. 37)

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

In summary, although there is little to no research that combines the idea of Common Core implementation with argument teaching and writing, it is possible to extract salient points from literature that focuses on one of the two aspects of this action research.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Methodology

Introduction

To recap, the problem was three-fold: (1) The 6th grade students' reading and writing levels were generally below grade level when the CCSS require a higher level of reading and writing. (2) The students had no experience in argument reading and writing, which are required by the CCSS. (3) The students demonstrate limited ability in critical thinking skills.

The primary research question was: Can a group of students who have medium to low rankings on the ITBS for students of high socio-economic status be raised to grade level in a fairly short time using the Common Core Standards? The hypothesis was that students would emerge from this eight-week study with measurably great critical thinking skills, close reading skills, argument evaluation abilities, and argument writing skills.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to describe the impact of using the Common Core State Standards in close reading and writing specifically and also how this instruction impacted students' critical thinking skills. In the past, students were taught persuasive writing, a genre which does not always demand logical, critical thinking. The teacher-researcher chose a mixed-method research design for this project. It was felt that the quantitative research data supported the qualitative data obtained through observations and student conferences.

Every teaching activity was directly linked to the 6th grade Common Core Standards. The standards were unpacked, and taught in a logical sequence using many of the ideas in George Hillock's *Teaching Argument Writing* (2011) and Fisher, Frey &

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Lapp's *Teaching Students to Read Like Detectives* (2012). As an example of this unpacking, one of the core standards is: "Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, distinguishing claims that are supported by reasons and evidence from claims that are not" (CCSS, 2010). This was unpacked into sub-content:

- What is an argument?
- Different types of arguments: arguments of fact, judgment, and policy (Hillock, 2011).
- How to find the argument in reading.
- What is a claim?
- Finding the claims in reading.
- Determining which claims have reasons and evidence and which do not.
- Evaluating the argument.

The research began with a quick review of reading strategies, followed by teaching the skill of close reading as found in the CCSS. Students began this process with solve-this-mystery types of arguments as suggested by Hillocks (2010), where every detail in the text and in the illustration were important clues.

The students also read articles on ProCon.org to practice the sub skills of argument reading. The intervention delved into the elements of arguments as taught by Hillocks:

- A claim,
- Based on evidence of some sort,
- A warrant that explains how the evidence supports the claim,

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

- Backing which supports the warrants, and
- Qualifications and rebuttals or counter arguments that refute competing claims (2011).

Interventions. The students in question had somewhat low levels of reading and writing for high socio-economic-status (HSES) students at the 6th grade level. (See Figure 1). The goal of this study was to do an intensive study of argument reading and writing based on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The area of critical thinking was addressed using the benchmarks embedded in the CCSS Standards, as well as scaffolding critical thinking skills using modeling, think-alouds, and pushing conversations in whole-group and small group settings.

The students involved in this project completed six argument-writing assignments apart from the pre-assessment and post-assessment writing samples. Included in these six writing assignments were three arguments of fact, which were written up as police reports about mysterious deaths, and three arguments of judgment, which were based upon criteria decided in small groups or as a class.

A new problem was presented each Monday, small group and class discussions took place on Monday and Tuesday, rough drafts were due electronically on Wednesday, the teacher returned these rough drafts with suggestions by Thursday morning, and the final drafts were due on Friday.

After the first writing assignment, the teacher-researcher noted that students assessed their own writing extremely high, whereas the teacher assessed it as low—generally between a third and fifth grade level. Because they assessed their writing so

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

high, they didn't attend to revision suggestions. She determined that students needed to score their rough drafts for 6 + 1 Traits® using Northwest Education's 6 + 1 Traits® scoring guide (2010) (See Appendix H), and that the scoring would be tied to a grade: If students scored the same as the teacher they received a 100%, if all student scores were no more than one point off from the teacher's scores the student received a 93%, and each score two points different from the teacher's scoring lowered the scoring grade five percentage points more.

Another decision was made that rough drafts would be graded and be accompanied by copious suggestions and mini-teachings using Microsoft Word's comment function. These suggestions often referenced specific argument writing skills from the TCR&WP rubrics in addition to the 6 + 1 Traits® (2010). The rough draft scores were temporary and were replaced by the final draft scores.

This new policy had several immediate effects: (1) Students began to self-assess more realistically as there was a grade tied to their self-assessment, (2) Five students (27%) asked for extra writing coaching which was provided by the teacher during recesses and lunch, and (3) 100% of the students began revising their writing. A sample of this scoring is shown in Appendix D, Figure 1D. In Appendix E you can also see sample growth in revision in the writing of low-level student, a mid-level student, and a high-level student.

Respondent group. The teacher-researcher provided data and observations obtained from one 6th grade Literature/English class which meets for two 90-minute class periods and four 45-minute class periods a week. The class consists of 16 students, only

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

three of whom are native speakers of English. One of the native English speakers has been diagnosed with dyslexia, and one of the ELL students has been diagnosed with ADHD. The group is equally divided between girls and boys. They're a pleasant, easy-to-work with class of 6th graders.

Data Collection Plan

The data collection plan is outlined in Figure 6.

Figure 6. Data Collection Matrix and Comprehensive Research Plan

<i>Questions</i>	<i>D.S. 1</i>	<i>D.S. 2</i>	<i>D.S. 3</i>
Preexisting knowledge?	ITBS scores	Reading Attitude Survey	TCR&WP Performance Assessment (pretest)
Argument reading?	Vocabulary in context test	Summaries of pro-con articles	TCR&WP Performance Assessment (posttest)
Argument writing?	Individual argument writing (rough draft)	Individual argument writing (final draft)	TCR&WP Performance Assessment (posttest)
Critical thinking?	Discussion groups (holistic rubric)	Logical arguments used in writing (tally & holistic rubric)	Logical arguments used in debate (tally & holistic rubric)

Note: D.S. = data source TCR&WP = Teachers' College Reading and Writing Project

How data was obtained.

- ITBS data provided by Country Day School Administration.
- The Reading Attitude Survey created by teacher-researcher can be seen at <https://sites.google.com/site/mrsstevens6thgrade/poll>
- TCR&WP Performance Assessments downloaded from TCR&WP website (used as pre- and post-unit data).

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

- Arguments, warrants, and backing were tallied in the pre- and posttest from TCR&WP Performance Assessment.
- In-context vocabulary test prepared by teacher-researcher measures understanding of parts of a written argument according to Toulmin's Model.
- Summaries of pro-con articles will be graded using the TCR&WP CCSS aligned rubric.
- A post-unit Likert scale survey about how much students believe they've learned from this unit will be administered at the end of the unit.

Time line.

- TCR&WP Performance Pre-Assessment August, 2012
- Reading Attitude Survey August, 2012
- Argument Reading & Writing Unit begins October 1, 2012
- Vocabulary in-context test October 11, 2012
- Argument Reading & Writing Unit ends November 14, 2012
- TCR&WP Performance Post-Assessment November 15-16, 2012
- Post-unit attitudinal survey November 16, 2012

Data Validity Analysis

Given that validity is “the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure” (Gay et al., 2009, p. 375 as cited in Mills, 2011, p. 113), a thorough analysis of the data for this study is in order. According to Guba (1981) “trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry could be established by addressing the following characteristics of a

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

study: *credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability*” (Mills, 2011, p. 104).

Credibility. In a truly “scientific” experiment, only one variable is changed. In this action research study there were many variables. Implementation of the CCSS in a class with generally medium to low abilities and thinking skills (as measured by the ITBS HSES statistics, and teacher observation), as well as the students’ over-inflated estimation of their abilities—possibly due to receiving A’s on assignments in elementary school based on assignment completion and effort rather than qualitative measures, called for a total makeover. Also, much of the study’s instructional time was used on related language arts issues such as 6-Traits® instruction and discussion skills. In other words, improvement cannot be proved to come solely from implementing the CCSS in argument reading and writing, although connections can be teased out of the data, as argument reading and writing are new genres for these students.

Transferability. This research is highly embedded in context—an international school that highly values the holistic nature of education as opposed to being overly driven by academics. The results could possibly be generalized to other schools with high SES and high levels of ELL students.

Dependability. The greatest amount of data will be gained from the pre-test and post-test of argument reading and writing using the TCR&WP performance assessment. The CCSS-based rubrics were used to score them, and the quantity of arguments and counter-arguments were tallied in both assessments. Students were also questioned about how much they felt they’ve learned about reading and writing arguments and improved in critical thinking abilities.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Audit Trail. The experts consulted about the validity of this data plan, generally liked the data collection plan, but three of the four were concerned about having more than one variable. It was mentioned by one of the two math teachers that it's necessary to explicitly state how growth is measured (mainly from growth in pre- and post-test scores).

Confirmability. If reflection is a characteristic of confirmability (Guba, 1981, as cited in Mills, 2011), and it is, then integrity and transparency in data collection and interpretation are key values. It is important that objectivity be maintained through careful use of rubrics—and scoring each paper and/or test at least twice.

Results

Findings

Argument reading. The first step in increasing assignment reading and writing ability was to learn the vocabulary for both. A vocabulary practice was created on Quizlet—a useful Internet site—and an in-context vocabulary quiz was written. On this quiz students chose which sentence used a vocabulary word correctly. For example:

“Choose the sentence that uses **relevant** correctly:

_____ In an argument about whether boys are smarter than girls, Wanda said it was relevant to include who has more friends in the data.

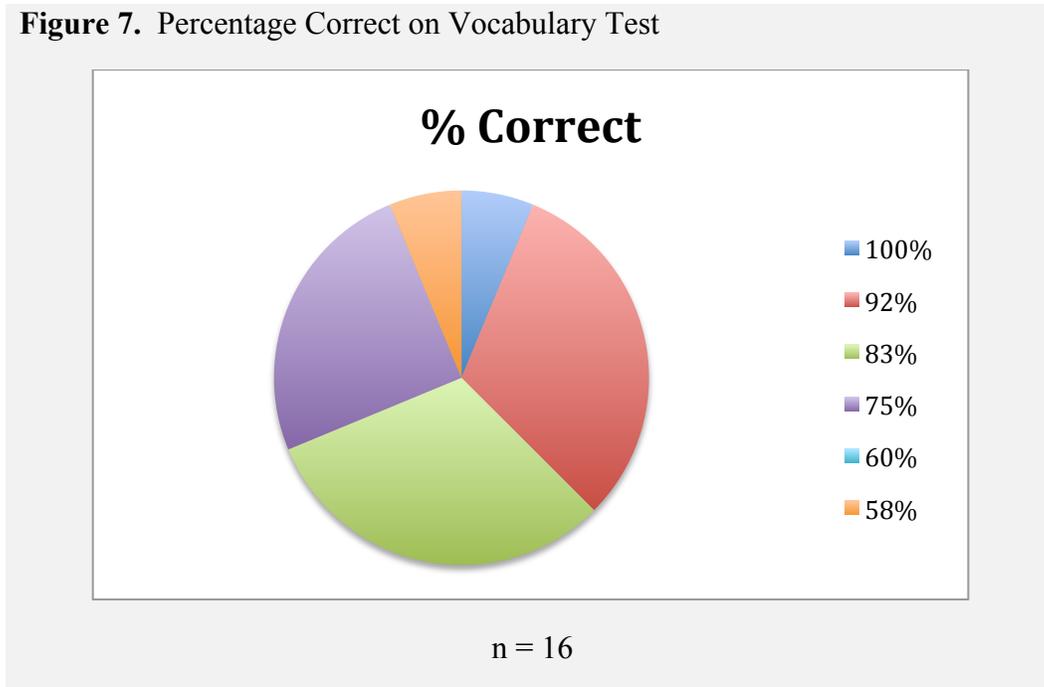
_____ In an argument about whether boys are smarter than girls, Wanda said it was relevant to include IQ scores in the data” (Stevens, 2012).

Both objective and subjective measures indicated that students had success using the vocabulary of reading and writing argument correctly. The objective success was indicated through the results of the vocabulary test (See Figure 7). The subjective

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

measures include the countless instances that students used vocabulary to communicate specifically and well during class and small group discussions.

Figure 7. Percentage Correct on Vocabulary Test



Much argument reading was intrinsically involved in the argument writing section of this intervention, but not specifically measured. However, the argument reading portion of evidence also included summaries of two articles from the ProCon website, which presents controversial subjects with pro and con points of view. The first ProCon topic was about the relationship of violent video games to youth violence. Discussion erupted from the class, as many of the boys are committed gamers. The teacher modeled how to write the pro and con statements from the website as bullet points in one's own words, which was followed by small-group discussion of the pro and con viewpoints. Each student then created their own set of bullet points followed by a short paragraph

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

stating their position and why they held that position—a mini-argument, if you will.

This helped scaffold the process of making meaning out of complex text.

Students did the same type of assignment—this time on social networking and without group discussion—as homework. According to the Lexile® Analyzer, the Lexile® level of this ProCon article was 1450L (Metametrics, 2012). According to the CCSS, students in the 6th to 8th grade band should read complex texts between the 955L – 1155L level. This text should have been beyond these students, but they had background knowledge of social networking and were quite passionate about it.

The reading portion of this assignment was graded using a simple rubric:

5 = Demonstrates total understanding in own words

4 = Demonstrates good understanding in own words

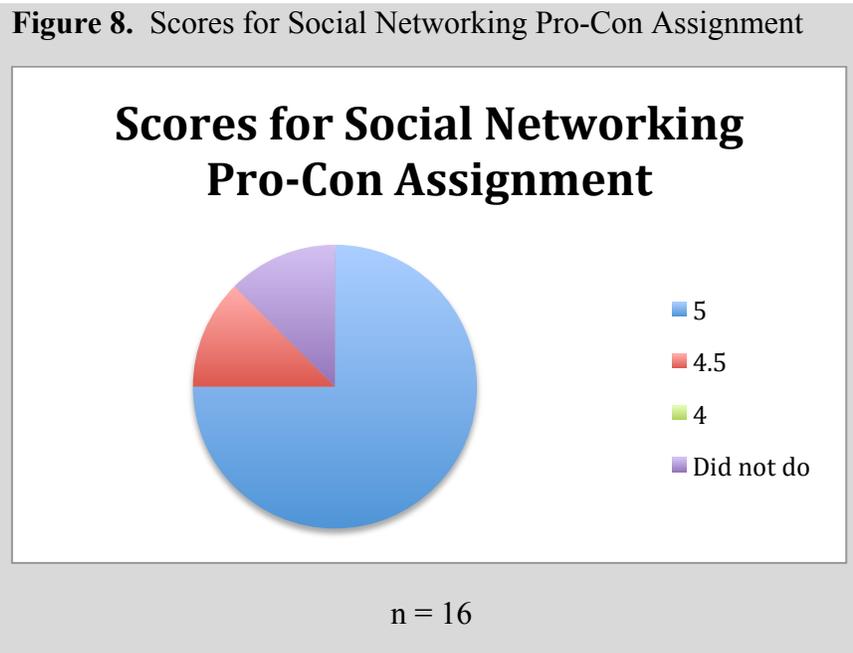
3 = Demonstrates partial understanding in own words

2 = Demonstrates little understanding in own words

1 = Demonstrates no understanding or does not use own words

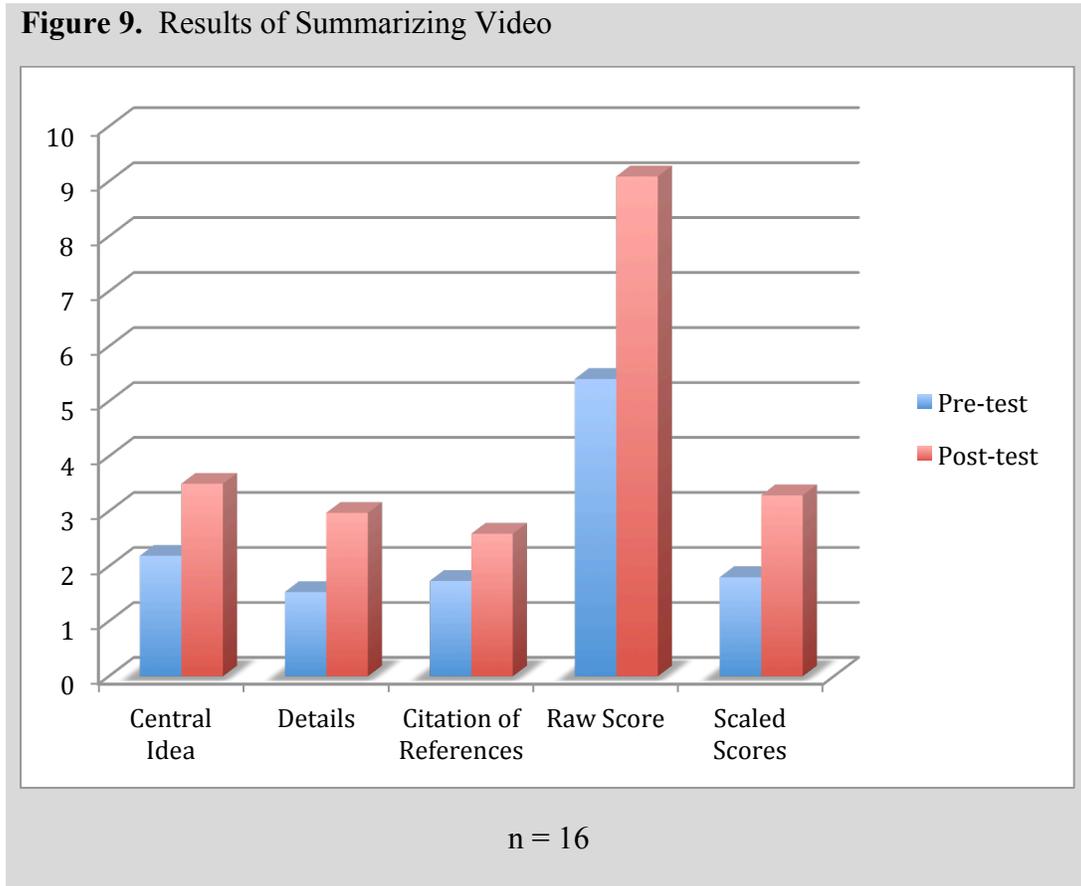
The results are shown in Figure 8:

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?



The reading section of the TCR&W project performance assessment (2011) consists of summarizing a video and two articles, which portray different points of view on having pets in the classroom. The research plan called for the exact same assessment to be administered for the pre- and post-test. Unfortunately, the video used for the pretest wasn't available and so another video on the same subject was substituted. The students moved from a mean score of 1.875 (out of a possible 4) to a mean score of 3.188, a statistically significant gain of 70.03%. (Figure 9)

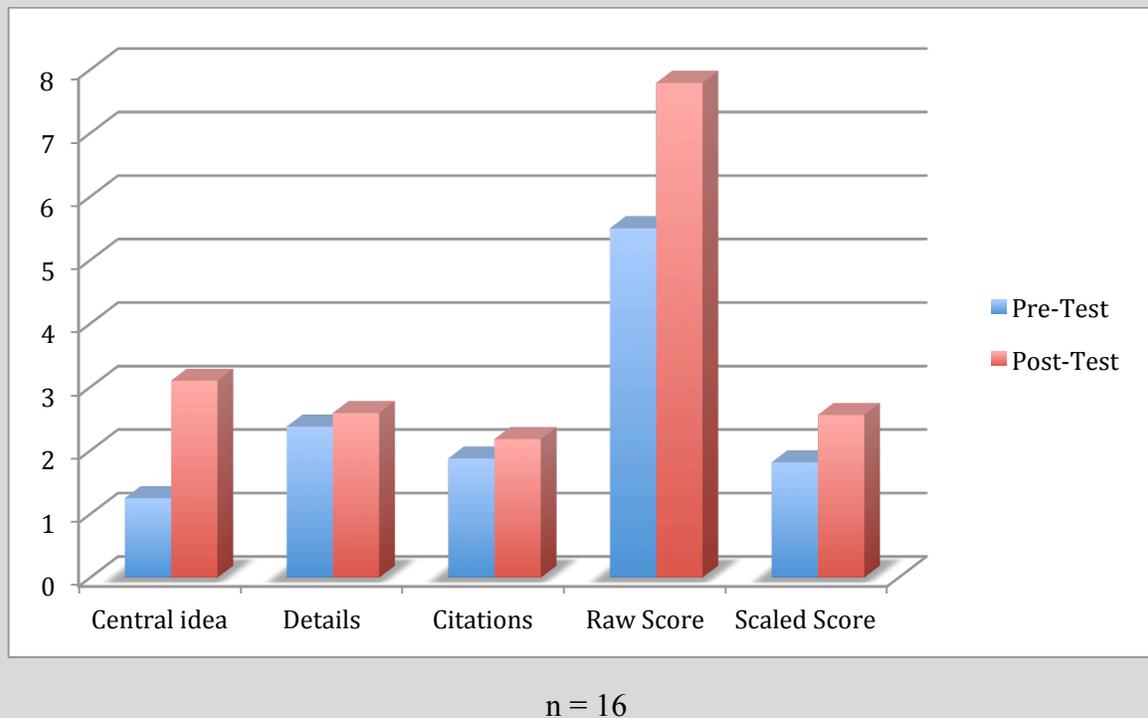
Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?



The second piece of the reading assessment (TCR&W, 2011) was writing a summary of the article, *Should Pets Be Allowed in the Classroom?* (TCR&WP, 2010), which the Lexile® Analyzer (Metametrics, 2012) assigned a Lexile® level of 1190L, slightly higher than the Lexile® range of 955L – 1155L recommended by CCSS (2010) for the 6th – 8th grade band. The students achieved a 41.44% gain in summarizing, moving from a pre-test mean of 1.81 to a post-test mean of 2.56. The results are shown in Figure 10.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

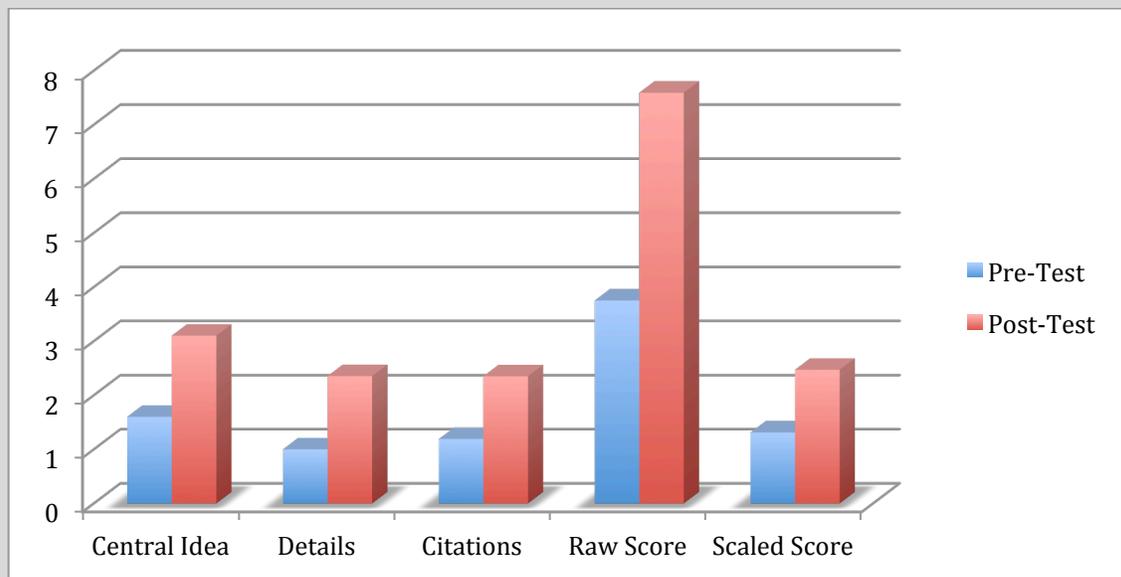
Figure 10. Results of Summarizing Article One



The third piece of the reading assessment was writing a summary of the article, *Leave Animals Out of the Classroom*, which the Lexile® Analyzer (Metametrics, 2012) assigned a Lexile® level of 1270L, again slightly higher than the Lexile® range of 955L – 1155L recommended by CCSS (2010) for the 6th – 8th grade band. Once again, a statistically significant gain was achieved—an 87.79% improvement. Students moved from a pre-test scaled score mean of 1.31 to a post-test scaled score mean of 2.46. The results are in Figure 11.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Figure 11. Results of Summarizing Article Two

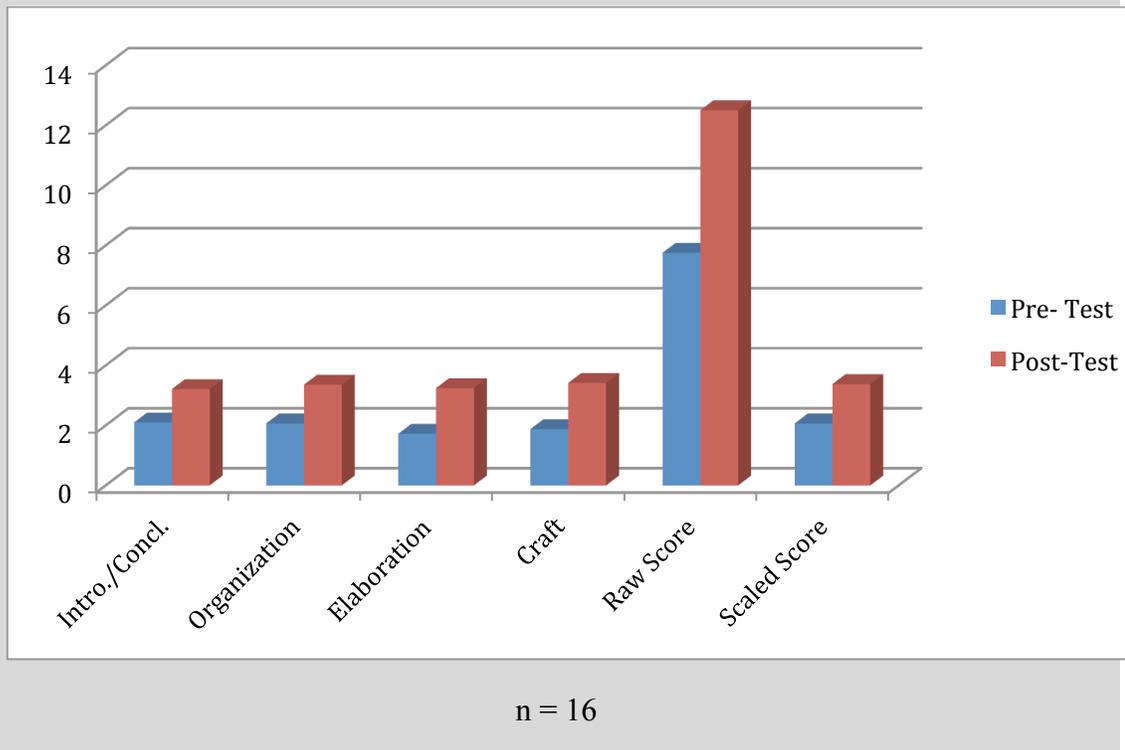


n = 16

Argument writing. The argument-writing portion of the TCR&WP performance assessment (2010) required students to write a letter to the school principal, which either defended or opposed the idea of having pets in the classroom. Results were scored for introducing claims, providing a conclusion that follows from the argument presented, organizing reasons and evidence clearly, supporting claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using transition words to clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, and using a formal style (TCR&WP, 2010). Once again, meaningful improvement resulted—a 63.6% gain as students moved from a mean scaled score of 2.063 in the pre-test to a mean scaled score of 3.375 in the post-test. The pre- and post-test results may be seen in Figure 12.

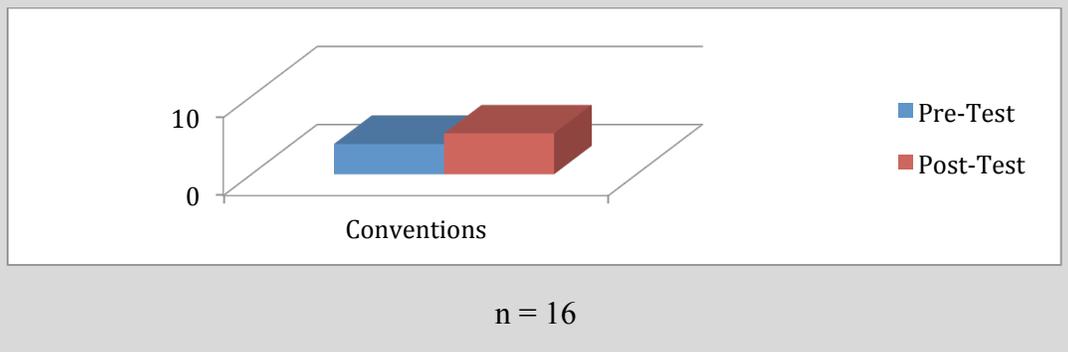
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Figure 12. Argument Letter Results



The students were also scored in their use of conventions: grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and usage. A smaller gain was seen in convention than in the other measurements. The gain was 35.05% from a pre-test mean of 3.88 on a scale of six to a 5.24 on the scale of six. The results can be seen in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Convention Use in Argument Letters



Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

As this measure didn't necessarily indicate the depth of the argument writing, the argument letter was also scored (See Table 14) using tallies of how many reasons students used, the quality of backing, and whether students included a counter-argument or not.

Table 14. Other Measures of Writing Quality.

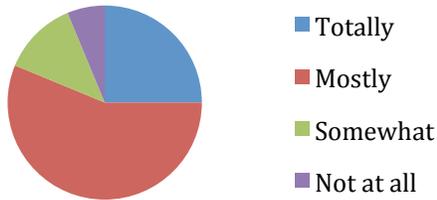
<i>Pre-Test Mean</i>	<i>Post-Test Mean</i>	<i>Percent Gain or Loss</i>
Number of arguments		
3.93	3.58	-8.91%
Quality of Backing on a 4-Point Scale		
2.43	3.29	35.39%
Counterarguments		
0.62	0.52	-16.13%
n = 16		

Student Self-Assessment. The student self-assessment survey (Appendix G) had subjective questions like “I believe I understand what an argument of fact is a) totally, b) mostly, c) somewhat, or d) not at all” (Stevens, 2012). The subjective questions were followed by objective questions such as, “Please write an example of an argument of fact” (Stevens, 2012). When checked against each other, it was found the students had become reliable in these self-assessment skills. The results of these subjective questions can be seen in Figure 15.

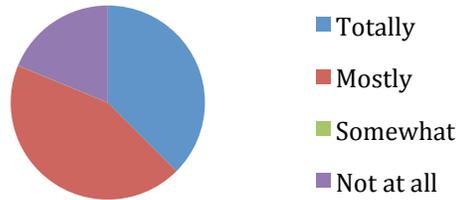
Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Figure 15. Results of Student Survey

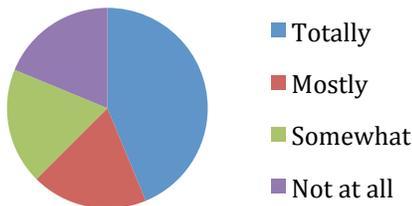
I believe I understand what an argument of fact is.



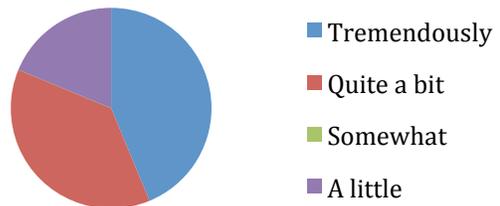
I believe I understand what an argument of judgement is.



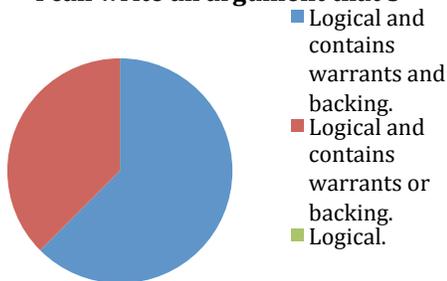
I believe I understand what an argument of policy is.



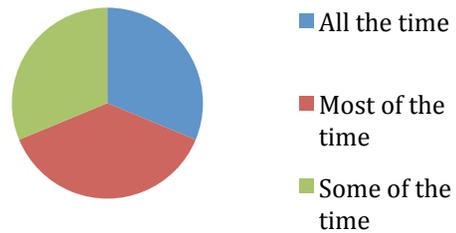
I feel that my argument writing has improved...



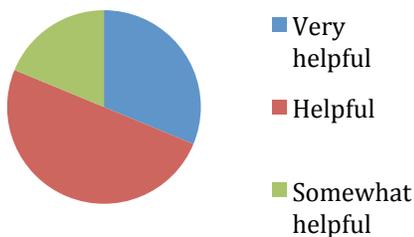
I can write an argument that's



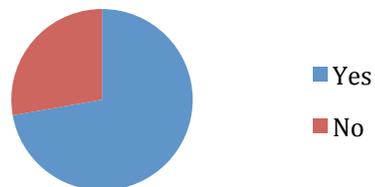
I include counter-arguments in my arguments.



Small-group discussions were...



I would like to learn more about argument writing.



n = 16

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Discussion

Reading results. The vocabulary test at the beginning of the unit, which forced students to apply understanding not just memorize the words, led to a greater understanding of the assignments and discussions in which precise vocabulary was used. Since 93% of the students received a passing grade on the test, which was given a week into the unit, that effect was felt almost immediately.

The reading portion of this unit began with close reading of drawings and short pieces of text that went along with the drawings, with the purpose of solving crimes. An example of this type of assignment is showed in Figure 16.

Once this process was modeled with group discussion, students were assigned to four small groups. Immediately, animated discussion began in two groups as students made meaning and investigated clues by acting out the crime, sketching out the crime, and building upon each other's comments. The other two groups were disengaged, often not even facing one another, and had no productive work going on. The groups were reshuffled, but the best that could ever be achieved were three high-functioning groups and one that limped along.

During this process of working to make groups profitable, the teacher first taught the group using complex rubrics for discussion, but later used SLANT, an acronym for: "Sit up, Lean forward slightly, Ask questions, Nod, and Take notes" (Tuiolosega, 2001, p. 11). The instruction, using SLANT, stuck. One student said, after the 2nd Presidential debate, "President Obama didn't hardly use SLANT at all! But Mr. Romney used it all the time."

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Figure 16. Sample Exercise for Judgment of Fact



“Slip or Trip?”

At five-feet-six and a hundred and ten pounds, Queenie Volupides was a sight to behold and to clasp. When she tore out of the house after a tiff with her husband, Arthur, she went to the country club where there was a party going on.

She left the club shortly before one in the morning and invited a few friends to follow her home and have one more drink.

They got to the Volupides house about ten minutes after Queenie, who met them at the door and said, “Something terrible happened. Arthur slipped and fell on the stairs. He was coming down for another drink—he still had the glass in his hand—and I think he’s dead. Oh, my God—what shall I do?”

The autopsy conducted later concluded that Arthur had died from a wound on the head and confirmed that he’d been drunk (Hillocks, 2012, p. 16-17).

This type of reading assignment led to progressively more difficult assignments until 6th grade students were able to make meaning of difficult short text such as those on the ProCon website which measured at a high (1450L) Lexile® level.

These results seemed to be a by-product of small-group discussions, high expectations, and step-by-step scaffolding.

The video and texts summarizing portion of the TCR&WP performance assessment pre- and post-test relates to CCSS reading standard 7: “Integrate and evaluate

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words” (CCSS, 2010, p. 35). Information in all three was about pets in the classroom looked at from different points of view.

Although circumstances forced students to summarize two different videos, the video for the post-test was much more complex than the pre-test video. If the students had watched the first video for both the pre-test and post-test, there probably would have been even a larger increase in mean scaled score than the 70.03% gain which was achieved. Sizeable increases were also achieved in the summaries of the two short texts—41.44% on the first, and 87.79% on the second. It is somewhat surprising to note that the higher gain was made with the more difficult reading material. This indicates growth in close reading, making meaning of complex text, and more perseverance as well. Holding students to the high standards of rigor required by the Common Core had a positive effect on student achievement. In the past, the teacher-researcher would have simplified the material for the lower-level readers. Raising the bar, at least for short texts, seems to be totally justified as a classroom practice.

Writing results. The student gains in writing over such a short time periods were nothing short of amazing. The students knew it and commented on it often, and the teacher-researcher is more than satisfied with the results.

Writing summaries and articles which included citations proved to be the most conceptually difficult skill the students experienced during this unit—more difficult even than using higher-level thinking in their reasoning. Most students had difficulties determining when a sentence needed a citation. Those who realized they had to cite

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

direct quotes tended to have too many quotations in their articles. Others thought that since all their ideas about this topic came from one of the three “texts” that they should simply put one giant citation at the end of the paper. Linear, literal thinkers struggled the most with this.

Once the students’ baseline of argument writing was found using the pre-test, the entire intervention was ramped into high gear with the probably unrealistic goal of 100% of the students achieving 6th grade level writing or higher by the end of the intervention. Since many students were working at a 3rd or 4th grade level, this was quite a challenge.

To achieve it, we needed to write one full essay a week. As earlier explained, a topic or problem was introduced on Monday, discussed on Monday and Tuesday, the rough draft turned in electronically on Wednesday, scored and returned on Wednesday and Thursday, and the final draft was due on Friday. With this schedule, conferences couldn’t take place during class, and so took place electronically. When a correction or suggestion was inserted, a teaching was connected to it. Surprisingly, this system resulted in a 25.05% gain in conventions from the pre-test to the post-test.

For better or for worse, many of the students and their parents at CDS are extremely grade conscious, so when students received low grades on their rough drafts many of them were motivated to seek coaching from the teacher-researcher—even outside of class time.

Following this intensive system, students became very aware—as heard in their comments—of great increases in their ability to write clearly. Although students used less arguments and counter-arguments in the post-test than the pre-test, the quality of

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

backing increased much, which indicates a higher level of critical thinking skills and organization.

Student self-assessment survey. One student, who was the cause of a malfunctioning discussion group, said, “I think that group discussions were not very helpful because no one makes sense and it is really hard to concentrate and at the end what you put in the essay is totally different.” However, the overwhelming majority found the small-group discussions helpful. For example: “Because they helped me write my essay with many ideas.” “Yes, because without the groups I wouldn’t understand many things.” “I think that our discussions were very helpful because I got to hear different people and [what] they thought about that which definitely helped me tremendously with the outcome of my essays.” In general, the self-assessment survey indicated the pride the students took in their growth and achievements as pertaining to argument reading, discussing, and writing.

Student self-assessment of improvement. Students also gave themselves grades in improvement in summarizing arguments and writing argument letters. They analyzed their pre- and post-test assessments on the TCR&WP performance assessments. Students did well on this assessment. Following are a few sample responses:

Improvement score on summaries: 93% “I think I should get this score because I have improved a lot for various reasons. When I came into this class at the start of the year I could not stay on a main idea. I would get distracted and get of [sic] track....Details. This is why I brought it down to a 93%. On the first one

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

I did not even know how to sneak in details without making it boring”

(Anonymous student notebook, 2012).

Improvement on summaries: 98%. I improved very largely. Before my main idea wasn’t expressed clearly. I didn’t talk much about what the article said, and I didn’t include many details. Looking at neatness, I favor my handwriting before, but when I look at the content, I find the second one more interesting, detailed, and it contains more information” (Anonymous student notebook, 2012).

Improvement score on writing an argument letter: 95%. “In the letter to Dr. Nolan I feel like I’ve improved a lot except for the closing paragraph. I think I’ve improved because my sentences are more detailed, original, and organized” (Anonymous student notebook, 2012).

Improvement score on writing an argument letter: 99.96%. “Looking back at the [first] letter, I did not put any counterarguments or backing. I did not put much [sic] reasons why I thought that. There was only one paragraph and I did not go into detail at all in my first letter. On my second letter I had counterarguments, backing, and I went into detail with why I think pets are good for the classroom. Everything I talked about revolved around my claim and I used backing to support my claim....Before I started this I did not know how to use craft or counterarguments at all, so I think I improved a ton.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Research questions.

Are the students developing critical thinking skills? In general, the students developed critical thinking skills based on informal and formal evaluations. The formal evaluation comes from the quality of backing improvement, and the informal evaluation of critical thinking skills comes from conversations heard in the classroom.

If not, what more can be done to develop that skill in individual students? Three students made limited progress in their critical thinking skills as observed in their writings, in their conversations, and in measures like the inclusion of counter-arguments and quality backing in their writings. All of them seemed developmentally immature rather than cognitively delayed. It seems they would benefit from training with analogies to help them learn how to think logically and make connections. Since analogies can be quite simple, the students can be led gradually toward greater critical thinking.

Are student arguments of a higher quality than they were previously? Definitely, as measured by all the data.

Does using the Common Core Standards as a foundation instead of the standards that were previously used at CDS make a difference in student progress? The CCSS did not so much cause greater progress to take place, as motivate the teacher-researcher to raise the bar in her expectations. Because the standards are higher than other standards that have been used at CDS and also higher than the teacher-researcher used formerly, and the fact that the students in her class at CDS wrote at a lower level to which she was accustomed, she put them through writing boot camp during the last three months. For the most part, students rose to the challenge with great success, even though

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

she broke one of the cardinal principles stated earlier in the paper, “When working on new and challenging writing, make the other aspects of writing less challenging (Calkins et al., 2012).” It seemed necessary to work on students on many fronts of their writing at the same time.

Summary of Results and Limitations of the Study

The teaching of argument reading and writing was totally new to the teacher-researcher as were the Common Core State Standards. These standards resulted in the teacher having higher expectations for her students than ever before. While the results of the argument reading and writing intervention resulted in more improvement than is generally seen in the same time period in the students’ abilities to read, write, and use small-group discussion to make meaning, there are a number of limitations of which the reader should be aware.

First, the amount of feedback the students were given about their writing each week is self-limiting. The teacher-researcher taught only one section of language arts consisting of three 45-minute classes of English/writing a week along with two 90-minute blocks and one 45-minute class of literature/reading a week, as well as one section of math. The amount of electronic feedback (a.k.a. electronic conferences) given to the students was extremely time consuming and would be difficult to do with more than one section of language arts. Perhaps with a different weekly schedule, such as grading the rough drafts over the weekend, this could be accomplished for more students. Second, both parents and students are highly motivated by grades at CDS, which is not the case at many schools. This motivation translated into highly focused effort to improve. These

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

results are most-likely not generalizable outside of a school where parents have high expectations and support their children’s academics in many ways, in a school with large classes, or with a teacher with a heavy load of language arts classes.

Action Plan

Rationale

Country Day School will begin K-12 implementation of the Common Core Standards in 2013-2014. The standards are currently being piloted in the middle school. The language arts program at CDS currently has little flow from one division to the other, and sometimes little coherence within the divisions. It seems that now is the time for change to take place as three out of four administrators want that flow to happen as well as three out of three curriculum coordinators. As such, there is great need for professional development that is aligned to the Common Core State Standards and the school Language Arts Action Plan. Teachers need to feel supported and that the work they do in these areas is not yet another educational fad the school is trying out. As such, the action plan presented here has two sections: 1) Table 17 which is a micro plan for the school, and 2) Table 18 which is a macro plan for the classroom.

Table 17: Micro Action Plan for the Classroom

Summary of findings research questions	Recommended action targeted to findings	Who is responsible for the action?	Who needs to be consulted or informed?	Timeline	Resources
1.0 Are the students developing critical thinking skills?	1.1 Continue to push class and small-group discussions to use critical thinking skills.	Teacher	Teacher	Continual	
1.1 Yes (most) 1.2 No (few) (See 2.0)					

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

2.0 If not, what more can be done to develop that skill in individual students?	2.0 Do work in basic critical thinking, such as analogies and other logical thinking exercises	Teacher	Teacher	2 nd semester- intro to each literature class	Resources easily found on the Internet
3.0 Are student arguments of a higher quality than they were previously?	Continue process of grading rough drafts and giving electronic feedback.	Teacher	Teacher	Begin again second semester with memoir unit.	Time
3.1 Yes, both quantitatively and qualitatively.	Resume teaching of conventions using in context paradigm.			English classes	Resources from Jeff Anderson
4.0 Does using the CCSS as a foundation instead of standards that were previously used at CDS make a difference in student progress?	Continue to find ways to raise standards using the CCSS and provide ways to scaffold students so they succeed. Push students to increase reading difficulty levels.	Teacher	Teacher	2 nd semester, beginning with memoir unit and Information Mondays (reading and writing information genre papers)	Comprehensive unit designs that include necessary scaffolding elements. Close monitoring of DRA levels. Individual reading conferences.
4.1 Yes, but because teacher expectations are raised due to the demands of the CCSS.	Challenging close readings on Mondays.				Small groups that make meaning of Monday readings.

For true change to take place, it needs to take place at a systemic level. The recently written Action Plan for Language Arts, a school-wide document (2012), and the recently established Language Arts Leadership Team (LALT) of which the teacher-researcher is co-chair is seeking to create “flow” through the divisions by many means,

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

which include the creation of a language arts curriculum document, the institution of selective hiring practices, and development of professional development aimed at having all faculty on the same page concerning 6 + 1 Traits®, the Common Core State Standards (2010), and critical thinking skills, to name a few areas of concern. The full document can be found online. Included in the macro-plan below are some systemic issues that connect directly with this action research project and align with the ELA Action Plan of CDS.

Table 18: Macro Action Plan for Country Day School

Summary of findings research questions	Recommended action targeted to findings	Who is responsible for the action? Who will monitor? (Bold)	Who needs to be consulted or informed?	Timeline	Resources
2.0 Are the students developing critical thinking skills? 1.1 Yes (most) 1.2 No (few)	School instituted programs in critical thinking last school year; teachers should continue to implement critical thinking skills in every unit.	Teachers Curriculum Coordinators Admin.	Teachers Curriculum Coordinators Admin.	Continual	Continual PD in critical thinking skills
2.0 If not, what more can be done to develop that skill in individual students?	Work with learning center to write up individual plans for students challenged in this area.	Learning Center Teachers Curriculum Coordinators Admin.	Admin.	2013-2014	Learning Center Staff
3.0 Are student arguments of a higher quality than they were previously? 3.1 Yes, both quantitatively and	Train teachers in teaching argument reading and writing as most have experience in persuasive writing, but not argument	Curriculum Coordinators	Admin.	2013 – 2014	Multiple copies of George Hillocks, Jr's book, <i>Teaching Argument Writing</i> (2012) for 6 – 12 th grade teachers. Find text resources for

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

qualitatively.	writing				elementary teachers.
4.0 Does using the CCSS as a foundation instead of standards that were previously used at CDS make a difference in student progress?	Teacher training in the Common Core State Standards—both ELA and content areas. Conversations about text complexity and shuffling of text sets.	Curriculum Coordinators LA teachers Curriculum Coordinators Administrators	Admin. Admin.	2 nd semester 2012-2013	Time to prepare trainings and time to present trainings (possibly in subject area meetings?) Time for subject area meetings. Copies of CCSS docs: “Application of Standards for ELL” and “Application for Students with Disabilities”
4.1 Yes, but because teacher expectations are raised due to the demands of the CCSS.	Discussions about how we apply the standards to ELL and LD students.	Curriculum Coordinators Administrators Guidance Counselors Learning Center	Admin. (Perhaps this is a topic for the MS/ES monthly meetings.)		

This paper will be verbally presented to the Language Arts Leadership Team, presented in writing to the administrators of Country Day School, and hopefully provide the foundation for professional development in the teaching of argument reading and writing.

Conclusion

The primary research question for this project was: Can a group of students who have medium to low rankings on the ITBS for students of high socio-economic status be raised to grade level work using the Common Core Standards in a fairly short time? The short answer to that question is: Yes. Several factors came into play to get these results.

First, the integrated approach of teaching argument reading and writing recommended by Newell, et al. (2011), was quite effective in this 6th grade classroom. It is a hybrid of two philosophies of the teaching of argument reading and writing—the

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

cognitive and the social. The cognitive portion included the explicit teaching of “rhetoric and logical form” (Newell, et al., 2011) based on Toulmin’s model of argumentation (Hillocks, 2011; Newell, et al., 2011). The social component was based on the theory that argument as a social practice results in a “snowball phenomenon” related to the ability to argue (Newell, et al., 2011). The students in the class were, for the most part, part of that snowball phenomenon—perhaps we could even call it an avalanche phenomenon—as students clearly made meaning and used critical thinking skills as they discussed their work. Without the social aspect, it is posited that students wouldn’t have made nearly the advances they made in their reading nor their writing.

Second, although Lucy Calkins strongly recommends that when “working on new and challenging writing, teachers should make the other aspects of writing less challenging” (Calkins, et al., 2012), the students responded well to the challenges they faced in all facets of their writing. The electronic “conferencing” and the use of the 6 + 1 Traits® helped to lift the students to entirely new levels in their writing.

Third, the Common Core State Standards were more than useful as they lifted the bar for both students and teacher. Where there was some concern about implementing these standards in a school full of English language learners, it now is an exciting challenge.

More research and many conversations are necessary to determine the best methods for accelerating growth up the reading and writing ladders at CDS. This research project has made that possibility seem do-able and a healthy goal to shoot for. This research project demonstrated that students’ understanding of complex pieces of short text could be raised quickly if the students have schema for the text. Text

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

complexity and whether the cognitive demands should be different for short and long texts is another conversation that needs to happen. Explicit vocabulary instruction needs to be a part of this acceleration, as does explicit teaching in close reading skills along with training in the reading strategies. The Common Core State Standards are not a redecorating fad for schools, but a complete overhaul, and argument writing will be one of the biggest challenges in this overhaul.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

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Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Appendices

Appendix A: Beginning of the Year Reading Attitude Survey

This survey was posted on the 6th grade wiki at the beginning of the year for students to complete.

Reading Survey

Please take your time to answer the questions well! It will help me teach you this year and find books that you will enjoy.

What is your name?

What are some of your favorite genres (types of books)? Check as many as apply.

- Realistic fiction
- Historical fiction
- Science fiction
- Fantasy
- Fairy tales and other traditional literature
- Poetry
- Mystery
- Biography
- Memoir
- Survival
- Adventure
- Spy

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

- Mythology
- Non-fiction (science)
- Non-fiction (history)
- Humor
- Magazines
- Short stories
- Newspapers
- Blogs
- Other _____

Summer reading Please describe what and what kind of reading you've done this summer. For example, I read about ten books including three written for teachers, several non-fiction books about economics and history, and some easy-read fiction.

What were your favorite books from last year? Feel free to list as many as you want.

What are your strengths as a reader? Be specific. For example, my strengths are that I'm good at monitoring my comprehension and have a large vocabulary. Plus, I LOVE to read!

What are your weaknesses as a reader? Be specific. For example, my biggest weakness is that I can read fast and so I do read fast, and sometimes I miss the beauty of the writing because of that. I'm learning to slow down.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

What goal or goals would you like to set for yourself this year? Here's mine: I would like to revisit some of the classics, slow down and read like a detective. I'd also like to keep a better record of books I read so that I can recommend them to others.

Appendix B: TCR&WP 6th Grade Performance Assessment

GRADE: 6th Grade

NAME OF ASSESSMENT: Reading Informational Texts and Argument Writing Performance Assessment

STANDARDS ASSESSED:

- Students will cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text. (RI.6.1)
- Students will determine the central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments (RI.6.2)
- By the end of the year, students will read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. (RI.6.10)
- Students will write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. (W.6.1)

Depth of Knowledge Level of Task: Levels 2-4

Task details:

- Duration of administration: Two class periods across one or two days.
- Time of year when administered: December
- Ideal class size: 20 – 25

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

- Gain size: Students should show growth in the skills targeted in this assessment within the month-long units of study in nonfiction reading and persuasive essay writing.

Materials needed:

- Video to stream: “Classroom Companion Helps Kids Learn <http://www.theindychannel.com/video/23071417/index.html>”
- Text: “Should You Have a Pet in Your Classroom?”
- Text: “Leave Animals out of the Classroom”
- Student booklet for responses
- Loose leaf paper

Explanation of Standards Alignment:

RI.6.1: Students will cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

- In their argument essays, students will call on their research, including citing textual evidence.

RI.6.2: Students will determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.

- Students will determine a central idea in each of two texts, and demonstrate in outline or written form how the idea is supported by particular details.

RI.6.10: By the end of the year, students will read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 6-8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

- Students will summarize the main idea of a grade level complex text by organizing some notes in an outline form. They will state a main idea, and show how that idea is supported by key ideas and details.

W.6.1: Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

- Students will write an argument essay on the topic of whether or not pets should be allowed in the classroom.

Overview of Assessment

****Note:** Suggested teacher prompts follow—please alter and make note of alterations based on your own conversational style and the ways in which you’ve talked about reading and writing nonfiction in your own classroom. The tasks below could be administered in many different ways.**

Suggested time frame: approximately 90 minutes total.

The four tasks could be administered in one or two chunks of time, in either one or two days.

First Class Period:

Task 1: Students will watch a video entitled “Classroom Companion Helps Kids Learn” and will be prompted to watch and listen for information about whether pets should or should not be allowed in school. After the video is shown a second time, students will be prompted to write a summary in the response packet.

Task 2: Students will read the article “Should You Have a Pet in the Classroom?” They will be prompted to use their response packet to summarize a central idea from the text and to explain how key details support that idea.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Task 3: Students will read the article “Leave Animals Out of the Classroom.” They will be prompted to use their response packet to summarize a central idea from the text and to explain how key details support that idea.

Second Class Period:

Students will have a chance to review their notes, and, if they want, and of the texts.

Task 4: Students will be prompted to write an argument essay/letter in which they craft and argument, and provide reasons and information supporting that argument, on the topic of whether their school should allow pets in the classroom or not. The students will be prompted to:

- Introduce the claim and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.
- Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.
- Use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationships among claim(s) and reasons, such as for example, for instance, in addition, moreover, etc.
- Maintain the formal style of an argument.
- Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument presented.

Suggested Teacher Prompts

Prepare for video and readings:

- Cue the video: “Classroom Companion Helps Kids Learn”
- Make copies for every student of the two articles.
- Make copies for every student of the student response booklet (attached to the end of this document)

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Possible Introduction to Assessment:

“You’re going to have a chance to show off what you know about doing quick, on-the-run intensive research, and composing a persuasive argument. Over the next couple of periods, you’ll encounter a few texts that will provide you with information and claims about whether or not pets in school are a good idea. It will be up to you to really analyze the information and ideas, so that you can state your own claim and justify it, using researched evidence.

For each text, you’ll have a chance to summarize the main points and the evidence that supports those points. Then you’ll have some time to look over your research. Then we’ll imagine that our school is taking a stand on whether or not to continue to allow animals in classrooms. You will write a persuasive essay, in the form of a letter, arguing one side. You’ll want to acknowledge the sides of the argument, cite research that backs your claim, and make a persuasive claim for either allowing pets in classrooms, or banning pets in classrooms.

Today is part one of this research project. You’ll have a chance to watch a video and read two texts today, and to write summaries of the most important ideas and information.”

Tasks 1 – 3: Approximately 45 minutes total time

Task 1: Videotext: watching and listening to gather information for essays

“You’re about to watch a news video about pets in school. As you watch, think about the important ideas and information in the video. After the second viewing, write down a central idea and explain how key details in the video got that idea across. I will show it twice, so that you have a chance to write down exact quotes the second time through.”

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Task 2: Reading to gather information for essay

Text: “Should You Have a Pet in Your Classroom?”

“Now you’ll have a chance to study an article about pets in schools. After reading this, write a summary in which you discuss a central idea in this article, and explain how key details get this idea across to the reader. Remember to quote some passages directly so that you can capture the author’s language exactly.”

Task 3: Reading to gather information for essay

Text: “Leave Animals Out of the Classroom”

“Now you’ll have a chance to study one last article about pets in classrooms. After reading this, write a summary in which you discuss a central idea in this article, and explain how key details get this idea across to the reader. Remember to quote some passages directly so that you can capture the author’s language exactly.”

Task 4: Argument Writing

“Researchers, you’ve done some good research now by studying this information and the ideas of these authors. Now you’ll want to clearly state a claim about whether or not to allow pets in the classrooms. First you’ll want to look over your summaries and notes, and the texts as well if you’d like, and decide, based on the best evidence from both articles, which side of the argument you will take up.

Then, imagine you are writing a letter to the principal, clearly supporting one side of this argument, and supporting that claim with convincing evidence you’ve gathered in your research. You’ll want to include information and details from the articles and video that support your claim. Use as much loose-leaf paper as you need for this writing.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

You'll want to take a few minutes to plan how your draft will go, and remember what you know about writing convincing arguments, including..."

Point to chart with standards...

- Introduce the claim and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.
- Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.
- Use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationships among claim(s) and reasons, such as for example, for instance, in addition, moreover, etc.
- Maintain the formal style of a persuasive essay letter.
- Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument.
- Quote directly from the texts you read and watched (TCR&WP, 2011).

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Leave Animals out of the Classroom

Animals in the classroom: Issues and Alternatives

[Adapted from an article by the World Society for the Protection of Animals]

At the end of every school year, shelters across the country are inundated with hamsters, mice, rabbits, gerbils, fish, guinea pigs, and reptiles that are no longer needed or wanted in the classroom. Many teachers believe keeping an animal in the classroom is a good way to foster responsibility, teach respect, or raise awareness about animals. But the learning environment can turn sour when the classroom pet becomes too big a burden and must be surrendered to the local animal shelter. Despite teacher's good intentions, keeping a classroom pet puts the animals at serious risk for neglect and substandard care. Once animals are in the classroom, important aspects of their nature are ignored completely. For example, hamsters and most small animals are nocturnal, yet they are kept in brightly lit classrooms and removed from their cages during the day. Birds tend to be sensitive to drafts and changes in air temperature, but climate control is normally regulated by the students' comfort levels, not the animals' needs. Furthermore, animals are removed from their habitat, and placed in cages.

Classroom pets are often neglected during school breaks and holidays. Many suffer from missed meals, unsanitary living conditions and lack of climate control. If left alone for a weekend, pets can be literally starving or dehydrated come Monday morning. A fire or power outage can also be deadly to an animal that is left alone in a building overnight or on weekends.

Animals' health can also be compromised when caregivers fail to address their nutritional needs.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Inadequate veterinary care also leads to failed health of classroom pets. Many animals actually die in classroom environments, which is not only a terrible fate for the animals but a devastating experience for the students.

Filling the role of classroom pet or mascot can be extremely stressful on an animal.

Going from five days of noise to two days of isolation is particularly traumatic and confusing. Constant poking and handling can also be taxing on an animal.

Furthermore, keeping animals in a classroom poses serious health risks for students.

Recently there have been reports of Salmonella, caused by having reptiles in the classroom. Students with asthma and or allergies can be adversely affected by the presence of an animal in the classroom.

Fostering responsibility and teaching respect are important components of a child's educational and personal development. Classroom pet duties, however, are not an appropriate method for instilling values. The learning process is inherently filled with mistakes and failures, which are appropriate in normal life circumstances but is it fair to allow a mistake by a child to result in the suffering of a dependent animal?

There are far more constructive ways to learn about living beings than by keeping animals in the classroom. Here are some suggested alternatives:

- Observe animals in their natural surroundings.
- Sponsor an animal in its environment.
- Take a trip to an animal wildlife rehabilitation center.
- Bring an animal specialist in.
- Take a virtual reality tour of an animal's habitat.
- Bring animals into the classroom through books, magazines, etc.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Should You Have A Pet In Your Classroom?

There are many reasons for keeping live animals in the classroom. Students of all ages can benefit from being exposed to other forms of life. The primary justification, although not the only one, is that live animals in the classroom teach children responsibility. There are many ways of doing this, but classroom pets are an engaging way to motivate students to take an active role in the class and to realize how important it is to be consistent when taking care of another creature. All too often children and adults alike desire to have pets, but without understanding the commitment level needed and the large responsibility affiliated with pet ownership. Sadly many pets suffer greatly from mismanagement, neglect, and abandonment. Raising pets in the classroom helps students to understand the needs of the animals and how much commitment is truly needed to keep animals comfortable and healthy.

Another justification for keeping and maintaining animals in the classroom is building empathy within students. Empathy gives students the ability to feel what others feel, whether it an animal or a fellow student. Developing this sometimes missing aspect in children may help the issues around bullying. Bullying can spill over into the animal world where people physically harm animals for varying reasons. Building empathy will enhance the desire to be a responsible pet owner and treat animals with respect, understand their needs and meet those needs; hopefully this will spill over into the human world.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

A final fundamental justification for the inclusion of animals in the classroom is the limited exposure that students have to live animals. This point is especially true in larger, urban centers.

Students from small, rural communities might also have limited exposure to live animals, unless from a farming background. Some students have a "squashing the bug" mentality toward live animals due to this lack of connection. Bringing animals into the classroom can help expose students to the natural world around them and encourage an active and kind participation in it.

In conclusion, there are many therapeutic benefits to associating children and school with pets. I encourage you to read about many of the advantages of classroom pets at the National Pet Week website.

This resource package is not intended to advocate the captivity of wild species, rather to foster a respect for animals through the use of classroom pets.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

TCRWP Informational Reading and Argument Writing Rubric- Sixth Grade

Sixth Grade Reading Rubric Assessing Tasks 1, 2, and 3	Level 1- Novice	Level 2- Intermediate	Level 3- Proficient	Level 4- Above Proficient
<p>Determining Importance: Main Idea</p> <p><i>R. Standard 6.2</i> <u>Determine a central idea of a text</u> and how it is conveyed through particular details; <u>provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.</u></p>	<p>Writes a summary in which a main but not central idea of the text is named, missing key elements of the text which may be more implicit. (i.e. "Animals need a natural habitat.")</p> <p>It is sometimes hard to tell whether the writer is writing about the topic him/herself or summarizing the text.</p>	<p>Writes a summary in which the writer names an idea which encompasses most of the text, but which may not account for some sections, or which does not account for more nuanced readings of the text. (i.e. "It's harmful to animals to keep them in the classroom.")</p> <p>May include some personal reactions that are not clearly delineated from the writer's summary of the text.</p>	<p>Determines a central idea of a text...; provides a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments.</p> <p>Writes a summary in which the writer names a central idea that is developed implicitly and explicitly throughout the whole of a text. (i.e. "The dangers of having a classroom pet are greater than the benefits.")</p> <p>Makes clear what the text itself suggests on the given topic, clearly distinguishing the summary from the writers' opinions or judgments.</p>	<p>Writes a summary in which the writer names a central idea that is mostly implicit in the text, also naming other more explicit ideas that support the central idea. (i.e. "This article is based on the idea that the health and welfare of animals is as important as students' enjoyment and learning. The writer shows us how animals are being harmed in classrooms, and how students could learn about animals in other, less harmful ways.")</p>
<p>Determining Importance: The Role of Key Details</p> <p><i>R. Standard 6.2</i> Determine a central idea of a text and <u>how it is conveyed through particular details</u>;</p>	<p>Recounts relevant details and connects them to a main or central idea.</p> <p>The explanation provided is too brief to fully reveal the role of the details; describes a connection that does not make sense.</p>	<p>Provides analysis of how particular details convey a central idea, noting mostly explicit connections.</p> <p>Some details are mentioned without explanation of their role in the text.</p>	<p>Explains how a central idea is conveyed through particular details.</p> <p>Explains how particular details implicitly and explicitly develop a central idea, referring to the author's exact words and noting authorial decisions and their effect.</p>	<p>Explains the role of particular details and in some cases provides analysis of the relative weight of these details in the whole of the text, or the degree to which particular details support a central idea in a convincing way.</p>

1

<p>Accountability to the Text</p> <p><i>R. Standard 6.1</i> Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</p>	<p>Refers directly to evidence from the text, but does not cite that evidence.</p> <p>Or, cites evidence that does not support the reader's analysis of the text.</p>	<p>Cites textual evidence that is mostly explicit in its support of a central idea.</p> <p>May cite some evidence that only tangentially connects to an idea in the text.</p>	<p>Cites textual evidence to support analysis...</p> <p>Cites textual evidence to demonstrate how key details and examples both explicitly and implicitly develop a central idea.</p>	<p>Cites multiple pieces of textual evidence that support an analysis of how key details and examples both explicitly and implicitly develop a central idea.</p>
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Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Sixth Grade Scoring Guide: Reading Tasks (1, 2 and 3)

Note: please use this rubric three times to score Task 1 (viewing and summarizing a video text), Task 2 (reading and summarizing a less complex text) and Task 3 (reading and summarizing a grade-level complex text). Please keep the scores separated to be able to determine students' relative strengths and needs.

In each row, circle the descriptor in the column that matches the student work. Total the number of points according to the guidelines below. Use the provided table to score each student on scale from 0 – 4.

For each response in column one, students receive one point.
 For each response in column two, students receive two points.
 For each response in column three, students receive three points.
 For each response in column four, students receive four points.

Scoring Table:

Number of Points	Scaled Score
No response	0
1-4 points	1
5-7 points	2
8-10 points	3
11-12 points	4

Sixth Grade Writing Rubric Assessing Task 3	Level 1- Novice	Level 2- Intermediate	Level 3- Proficient	Level 4- Above Proficient
<p>Focus/Structure: Introduces claims; Provides a concluding statement</p> <p><i>W. Standard 6.1</i> Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. a. <u>Introduce claim(s)</u> and organize the reasons and evidence clearly. e. <u>Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument presented.</u></p>	<p>Introduces a claim briefly, without giving enough context for the argument, or by using outside information or personal opinions that confuse rather than strengthen the claim statement.</p> <p>May exactly repeat the claim from the introduction as a brief conclusion; or in an attempt to rephrase or elaborate may confuse or contradict the central claim.</p>	<p>Introduces the claim by providing some context for the reader. States a claim clearly.</p> <p>Writes a concluding statement or section that does not conflict with or repeat without rephrasing the central claim or its key supports.</p>	<p>Introduces claim(s).</p> <p>Provides a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument.</p> <p>Orients the reader, including some context for the topic of the argument. Clearly states a claim or claims and demonstrates an attempt to convince the reader to agree with the claim.</p> <p>In a concluding statement or section, continues or elaborates on the central claim of the argument and its key supports.</p>	<p>Orients and engages the reader in the topic, writing to explain or show through anecdotes or examples what's at stake in the argument. Crafts a claim that takes a nuanced stance on the topic.</p> <p>Crafts a concluding statement or section that follows from the argument and strengthens the central claim through further evidence or elaboration.</p> <p>May acknowledge counterarguments or opposing claims in either the introduction or conclusion.</p>
<p>Focus/Structure: Creates an organizational structure</p> <p><i>W. Standard 6.1</i> Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. a. <u>Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly.</u></p>	<p>Attempts to create an organizational structure, but many sections have no apparent cohesion.</p> <p>The connection between reasons and evidence or the reasons and the central claim is unclear.</p>	<p>Organizes reasons and evidence.</p> <p>Some sections are more clearly organized than others. The structure of the argument is not always clear.</p>	<p>Organizes reasons and evidence clearly.</p> <p>Uses paragraphing and makes other structural decisions (choice of linking words, order of information, etc.) to organize reasons and supporting evidence. It is clear how evidence corresponds to the central argument and supporting ideas.</p>	<p>Uses logical principles to organize reasons and evidence, demonstrating that the writer has considered the order of the reasons and evidence and how they will be grouped.</p>

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Sixth Grade Writing Rubric Continued	Level 1- Novice	Level 2- Intermediate	Level 3- Proficient	Level 4- Above Proficient
Elaboration: Supporting Evidence <i>W. Standard 6.1</i> Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. b. Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.	Provides reasons to support an opinion, including little or no evidence from the provided sources. The writer demonstrates confusion or conflicting understandings of the topic.	The claim is supported by reasons and evidence, with some references to the provided sources. Some evidence is loosely connected to the reasons or the central argument, or is based on questionable source material. The writer demonstrates a partial understanding of the topic.	Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic. Supports claims with reasons that clearly align with the writer's stance and that are based on evidence. Cites relevant text evidence from the provided sources. Elaborates on evidence to demonstrate an understanding of the topic.	Supports claims with convincing reasons that strengthen the writer's stance and that are based on multiple citations of strong textual evidence. Uses a variety of forms of elaboration to illuminate the value of the textual evidence and its relevance to the argument. May also comment on the authority of the evidence.
Craft <i>W. Standard 6.1</i> Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationships among claim(s) and reasons. d. Establish and maintain a formal style.	Uses some transitional words and phrases, mostly of an explicit nature, such as "because" or "therefore" rather than truly clarifying the between reasons to the claim. Begins to attempt a formal style, but quickly falls out of it into a more informal mode.	Mostly uses clarifying phrases and clauses; at times confuses the use of certain clarifying phrases or clauses, or neglects to clarify some connections between claims and reasons. Attempts a formal style, but at times falls into a more informal way of writing, as if talking to a friend rather than composing an essay.	Uses words, phrases and clauses to clarify relationships among claim(s) and reasons. Establishes and maintains a formal style. Finds the appropriate vocabulary to shift between claims and reasons in ways that do not confuse the reader. Maintains a formal style.	Creates cohesion using linking words, phrases and clauses; makes it easy to trace the relationship of claims, reasons and evidence in the writer's argument. Establishes and maintains the formal style of an essayist, making sure to support all aspects of a claim with documented evidence.

5

Sixth Grade Scoring Guide: Writing Task

In each row, circle the descriptor in the column that matches the student work. Total the number of points according to the guidelines below. Use the provided table to score each student on scale from 0 – 4.

- For each response in column one, students receive one point.
- For each response in column two, students receive two points.
- For each response in column three, students receive three points.
- For each response in column four, students receive four points.

Scoring Table:

Number of Points	Scaled Score
No response	0
1-5 points	1
6-9 points	2
10-13 points	3
14-16 points	4

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Appendix C: Vocabulary-in-Context Test

Vocabulary Test: Reading and Writing Arguments

Name _____

Choose the sentence that uses argument of fact correctly:

_____ In court, the witness made an argument of fact that the fingerprints were that of the suspect.

_____ In discussion, the students made an argument of fact about who would make the best president.

_____ The student made an argument of fact that the school should change the uniform rules.

Choose the sentence that uses argument of judgment correctly:

_____ The student made an argument of judgment that the suspect was guilty according to the evidence.

_____ The students made an argument of judgment that Chavez is not a good president.

_____ The students made an argument of judgment that the country's position on relationships with mainland China is a good one.

Choose the sentence that uses argument of policy correctly:

_____ The student made an argument of policy that the suspect was guilty according to the evidence.

_____ The students made an argument of policy that Chavez is not a good president.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

_____ The students made an argument of policy that the country's position on relationships with mainland China is a good one.

Choose the sentence that uses claim correctly:

_____ My claim is that Queenie was guilty.

_____ The student made an argument of claim that boys are smarter than girls.

Choose the sentence that uses evidence correctly:

_____ My evidence is that anyone can see that Chavez is a dictator.

_____ Chavez has closed down several TV stations and newspapers, which is evidence that he is a dictator.

_____ The evidence came to the house to collect fingerprints.

Choose the sentence that uses warrant correctly.

_____ The warrant is that 70% of students do better when they chew gum when taking a test.

_____ The warrant is that students are more relaxed when chewing gum, so they do better on the test.

_____ The warrant is that teachers have begun to pass out gum before tests.

Choose the sentence that uses backing correctly.

_____ The backing is that 70% of students do better when they chew gum when taking a test.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

_____ The backing is that students are more relaxed when chewing gum, so they do better on the test.

_____ The backing is that teachers have begun to pass out gum before tests.

Choose the sentence that has a qualification:

_____ All girls are good writers.

_____ Many girls are good writers.

_____ No girls are good writers.

Choose the sentence that uses counter-argument correctly:

_____ The customer sitting at the counter had an argument with the waitress.

_____ On the other hand, many have a counter-argument that chewing gum while taking a test makes students more stressed.

_____ As a rule, people don't have loud arguments at the counter.

Choose the sentence that uses opinion correctly:

_____ In my opinion, reading a book is better than playing video games.

_____ According to the survey, 70% of 6th grade students like to read, so that is my opinion.

Choose the sentence that uses relevant correctly:

_____ In an argument about whether boys are smarter than girls, Wanda said it was relevant to include who has more friends in the data.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

_____ In an argument about whether boys are smarter than girls, Wanda said it was relevant to include IQ scores in the data.

Choose the sentence that uses conclusion correctly:

_____ Sandy reached the conclusion that Amy was guilty after reading the evidence report.

_____ The conclusion was a report from the autopsy that indicated that he was drunk.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Appendix D: Rough Draft Scoring Sample

Figure D1. Rough Draft Scoring Sample			
Ideas & Content	4/6	3 /6	You're missing a lot of evidence. You need to include all the evidence, and then you need to make sense of the evidence.
Organization	4/6	3 /6	You need one paragraph for evidence, and then multiple paragraphs to connect each piece of evidence to what you think happened, and finally, a conclusion.
Voice	5/6	4/6	You pretty much maintain formal voice—try to make it sound a bit more like a detective.
Word choice	6/6	4/6	A murder is what happened; the murderer is the person who commits the murder. A hand makes a hand print on the wall.
Sentence fluency	6/6	4/6	Please read your writing out loud—both for sense and for flow.
Conventions	6/6	4/6	You need to capitalize “Customer C” because you are using that as his name.
Presentation	3/6	4/6	Your title should be written as a police report with a police department heading.
Total	34/42	26/42	62% Please remember, I'm happy to help you before or after school or during either of the breaks.
Scoring grade	78%		

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Appendix E: Sample Growth in Revision

Table E1. Sample Revision	
First Argument of Judgment: School Mascot (Hillocks, 2010)	
<p>First draft: English language learner, 2nd year learning in English (lower level)</p> <p>I think that miners are the best mascot for John L. Lewis Elementary School. Some people of Floodrock, Illinois really like miners because it's part of one of the two major industries. Now thinking about the school the word "miner" is a funny, unique, creative, and it's an easy word to say. This mascot would have the honor to represents the John L. Lewis Elementary School.</p>	<p>Final draft: English language learner, 2nd year learning in English (lower level)</p> <p>I think that miners are the best mascot for John L. Lewis Elementary School. Most people of Floodrock, Illinois really like miners because it's part of one of the two major industries, and everybody would love to cheer for one of their major industries.</p> <p>Now thinking about the school, the word "miner" is a unique and creative word for a mascot because people always think of an animal as a mascot not a work, also a miner is actually not a particular work because if you'll ask somebody of a job, they'll probably say :doctor, lawyer, etc. Miner is not a lame word because being a miner is actually an important job because miners bring important materials to the Earth such as gold. Also miner is a easy word to say, because imagine a mascot called Matilisguate, which is not an easy word to say, everybody will be quiet when they need to cheer for their team, instead miner is a really easy word to cheer for. The mascot of a school needs to be original, unique, funny, and creative, such as miner. For the power that I have in this case I would have the honor to say that miners will represent the John L. Lewis Elementary School.</p>

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

<p>First draft: Native English speaker, dyslexic, mid-level</p> <p>A miner would make the best mascot because there school is named after the miner John L. Lewis so it would make since to make the mascot a miner. The place is all about mining a miner could have many good chants to cheer like you dig to deep, or mine mine MINE, and you fell in your tunnel and not your going to pay and so on. It would make people happy knowing there school has something in common with the place it is in. old miners that are dead or alive would be proud of there kid for being a miner.</p>	<p>Final draft: Native English speaker, dyslexic, mid-level</p> <p>A miner would be the best school mascot for the John L. Lewis Elementary School because their school is named after the miner, John L. Lewis, who is the founder of the mine. The place is all about mining because of all the mining tunnels and old miners. A miner mascot could have many good chants to cheer like “you dug too deep”, or “mine, mine, MINE”, and “you fell in our tunnel and now you’re going to pay” and so on. A problem might be that the chanting would get old and a miner is not such a cool mascot. It would be hard to get the kids up and cheering happily. On the bright side, it would make people happy knowing their school has something in common with the place it is located. Old miners that are dead or alive would be proud of their kids going to a school with a miner as the mascot.</p>
<p>First draft: Upper level student, learning in 3rd language</p> <p>I think the Miners are the best mascot for the school because it represents the area. The area is an area where mining is the main job for people. The other three, lowland gorillas, lemurs, and manatees, have no direct connection to the area. The miners are a big part of southern Illinois. The miners are good to cheer for, easy to spell, and they catch attention. A good</p>	<p>Final draft: Upper level student, learning in 3rd language</p> <p>I think the Miners are the best mascot for the school because it represents the area, Floodrock, Illinois. The area is an area where mining is the main job for people. The other three, lowland gorillas, lemurs, and manatees, have no direct connection to the area. The miners are a big part of southern Illinois. The miners are good to cheer for since they seem funny</p>

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

<p>catch phrase could be, “Miner mine rock!”, and it is creative. It isn’t lame, and it catches attention. The other mascot, the manatee seems kind of lame to cheer for, lemur doesn’t represent anything of the school, and the lowland gorillas don’t make any sense because it just seems silly. It seems fair, because it is for both for girls and boys, it can be fashionable, and it isn’t racist. It can be kind of awkward for girls to be miners, and lemurs or manatees can be cute and cool at the same time, but that shouldn’t be the only reason to choose them. Miners mine rock!!</p>	<p>and easy to spell. They can catch attention of other teams and parents because they are unique. A good catch phrase could be, “Miners mine rock!”, and it is creative. It isn’t lame, and it catches attention. The other mascot, the manatee seems kind of lame to cheer for because it has three syllables and manatees are fat. Lemurs don’t represent the school because lemurs are from the tropical rainforest, and the lowland gorillas don’t make any sense because they just seem silly. It seems fair, because it is for both for girls and boys; it can be fashionable, and it isn’t racist. It can be kind of awkward for girls to be miners, and lemurs or manatees can be cute and cool at the same time, but that shouldn’t be the only reason to choose them. Miners mine rock!!</p>
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Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Appendix F: Holistic Critical Thinking Rubric

Figure F1. Holistic Critical Thinking Rubric
<p>Strong 4. Consistently does all or almost all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accurately interprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc.• Identifies the most important arguments (reasons and claims) pro and con.• Thoughtfully analyzes and evaluates major alternative points of view.• Draws warranted, judicious, non-fallacious conclusions.• Justifies key results and procedures, explains assumptions and reasons.• Fair-mindedly follows where evidence and reasons lead.
<p>Acceptable 3. Does most or many of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accurately interprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc.• Offers analyses and evaluations of obvious alternative points of view.• Draws warranted non-fallacious conclusions.• Justifies some results or procedures, explains reasons.• Fair-mindedly follows where evidence and reasons lead.
<p>Approaching Acceptable 2.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Occasionally misinterprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc.• Occasionally fails to identify strong relevant counter-arguments.• Occasionally draws unwarranted or fallacious conclusions.• Justifies few results or procedures, occasionally explains reasons.• Attempts to fair-mindedly follow where evidence and reasons lead.
<p>Weak 1. Does some or many of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Misinterprets evidence, statements, graphics, questions, etc.• Fails to identify strong relevant counter-arguments.• Draws unwarranted or fallacious conclusions.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

- Justifies few results or procedures, seldom explains reasons.
- Regardless of the evidence or the reasons, maintains or defends views based on self-interest or preconceptions.

Adapted from Facione & Facione's Holistic Critical Thinking Scoring Rubric (2009)

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Appendix G: Argument Reading & Writing Post Intervention Survey

Argument Reading & Writing Student Survey

Name _____

I believe I understand what an argument of fact is (a) totally, (b) mostly, (c) somewhat, (d) not at all.

Please write an example of an argument of fact.

I believe that I understand what an argument of judgment is (a) totally, (b) mostly, (c) somewhat, (d) not at all.

Please write an example of an argument of judgment.

I believe I understand what an argument of policy is (a) totally, (b) mostly, (c) somewhat, (d) not at all.

Please write an example of an argument of policy.

I feel that my argument writing has improved (a) tremendously (a whole lot), (b) quite a bit, (c) somewhat, (d) a little.

I can write an argument (a) that's logical and includes warrants and backing, (b) that's logical and includes warrants OR backing, (c) that's logical but contains little support.

I include counter-arguments in my arguments (a) all the time, (b) most of the time, (c) some of the time, (d) none of the time.

Can Implementation of the Common Core Standards in Argument Reading and Writing Positively Affect Reading and Writing Results?

Small-group discussions were (a) very helpful, (b) helpful, (c) somewhat helpful, (d) not helpful.

Explain why or why not the small group discussions were helpful or not.

I would like to learn more about argument reading and writing. Yes. No.