

# Lessons From Sociocultural Writing Research for Implementing the Common Core State Standards

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The Common Core State Standards for Writing do not explicitly emphasize context and culture. How might sociocultural theory and research help us interrogate and implement the Standards with greater attention to these factors?

Writing matters. It gives students voice, helps them understand themselves and the world, and contributes to their professional success (National Commission on Writing in America's Schools and Colleges, 2003; Sperling & Freedman, 2001). Despite the importance of writing, it has historically received less attention in standards, curriculum, and instruction than reading, and test data continue to show that students lack proficiency in grade-level writing (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). The increased attention to writing in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is therefore admirable and timely. However, in taking a college and career readiness perspective, the Standards neglect to emphasize the role of context and culture in learning to write.

Although there is a lack of research consensus on how writing develops (Graham & Harris, 2015), the Standards' college and career readiness perspective suggests a pathway for writing development that was determined by starting with what students need to know in college and careers, then working backward (e.g., moving from drawing and dictating to conventional encoding in the early grades). This means that the Standards focus on the development of encoding skills but are "notably silent about the role of context" (Graham, Harris, & Santangelo, 2015, p. 501). What we mean by "the role of context" is the recognition that writing is not just a cognitive process but a social and cultural one. Writing and writers develop through interactions with one another over time. For example, if a first-grade black student's white teacher is constantly telling her that

her language use is incorrect or nonstandard (see Dyson & Smitherman, 2009), she may lose motivation to engage with writing and come to see herself as a nonwriter early in school, which could have long-term consequences for her schooling and life.

Such ideas about the role of context and culture in writing development underlie a sociocultural perspective that pays particular attention to the ways that writers develop practices and identities over time and in interactions with others, recognizing that "conventional encoding is not arrived at in a uniform, linear path (Clay, 1998) and that composing involves much more than encoding" (Dyson, 2015, p. 201). Such perspectives combat pervasive deficit discourses, or negative attitudes and opinions about the language use and abilities of nondominant students who don't climb the highly sequenced developmental trajectory in anticipated ways (see Dyson, 2015).

## Examining the Writing Standards Through a Sociocultural Lens

In this article, we argue that a sociocultural perspective, which positions teachers to draw on their local knowledge to contextualize learning for their

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students, offers insights into how to interpret and implement the Standards in more meaningful ways. However, using theory and research to interpret, supplement, and critique the Writing Standards may be particularly challenging for educators who typically have little access to high-quality writing content in teacher education and professional development (McCarthy, Woodard, & Kang, 2011) and often feel unprepared to teach writing (Gilbert & Graham, 2010).

We suggest a process for critically examining both explicit and implied messages in the Writing Standards: (1) describing what the Standards explicitly say, (2) highlighting additional information from the Standards that may be missed without digging deeper into the appendixes, and (3) detailing important components that the Standards do not address. We summarize this information in reference charts that can guide the reading of this article. Using this process, we showcase three potential instructional implementation gaps that highlight areas where the Writing Standards as written may encourage a disconnect between sociocultural research and practice: text types, technology, and conventions. Finally, we synthesize key sociocultural understandings discussed in the examples and offer concrete suggestions to guide further critical interrogation of the Standards as part of professional practice.

### From “Text Types and Purposes” to “Genre”

Writing Anchor Standards 1–4 identify three text forms for students to master: opinion/argument, informative/explanatory, and narrative. They also suggest an explicit focus on task, purpose, and audience (see Table 1). In accompanying text, the Standards acknowledge that “these [three] broad types of writing include many subgenres” (p. 18). Appendix A of the CCSS (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010b), for example, explicitly states that “the narrative category does not include all the possible forms of creative writing, such as many types of poetry” (p. 23), and that “skilled

writers many times use a blend of these three text types to accomplish their purposes” (p. 24). However, the Standards do not acknowledge that the privileging of argument as a text type is contested; nor do they explicitly connect a focus on text types to the social dimensions of writing.

### Privileging Argument as a Text Type Is Contested.

“While all three text types are important, the Standards put particular emphasis on students’ ability to write sound arguments on substantive topics and issues, as this ability is critical to college and career emphasis” (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010b, p. 24). The Standards cite research on the importance of argument, particularly in disciplinary, collegial, and professional writing (e.g., Graff, 2003). Other contemporary researchers have highlighted how argumentation helps students understand differing perspectives (Doerr-Stevens, Beach, & Boeser, 2011) and is a necessary skill for democratic participation (Hillocks, 2011).

However, this push toward argumentation as the most important text type to use and teach in school is also contested. For example, DeStigter (2015) documented how Manny, a Mexican student, struggled to use a Toulmin-style graphic organizer, which focuses on warranting claims with evidence, for an essay assignment about whether schools should foster individuality or conformity. Olson, Scarcella, and Matuchniak (2015) similarly described why argument is a linguistically and rhetorically difficult text type for English learners, suggesting that narrative forms should be taught first as a foundation before focusing on more complex text types.

DeStigter (2015) highlighted a concern that when we start to equate the ability to write a particular style of argument with high-quality thinking (see Hillocks, 2010), we assume that all students are socialized into this style of thinking and ignore “the vast and beautiful variance in what Shirley Brice Heath (1983) describes as people’s ‘ways with words’” (p. 19). Furthermore, although the structure of argument is commonly taught as a straightforward model (introducing a claim, providing supporting

### PAUSE AND PONDER

- Why do standards and curriculum frequently neglect insights from sociocultural research about teaching and learning writing?
- How might reading the standards with a sociocultural lens expand teachers’ and learners’ opportunities for participation, engagement, and literacy learning?
- What might implementing the Common Core Writing Standards from a sociocultural perspective look like in your school and classroom?
- What processes can support educators to critically examine the explicit and implied messages in standards and curriculum?

evidence, connecting the claim and evidence with reasoning, etc.), numerous composition and rhetoric scholars taking sociocultural perspectives have demonstrated great variation in arguments' structures, goals, and effects depending on context (Newell, Beach, Smith, & VanDerHeide, 2011).

Whereas a college and career readiness perspective emphasizes argument, a sociocultural perspective acknowledges that argument is no doubt important, but it is not the only or best way to think and write. It has long been a powerful form and text type to teach in part because it aligns with middle-class white "ways with words."

**A Focus on Text Types Neglects the Social Dimensions of Writing.** In addition to the overemphasis on argument, noticeably absent from the first three Writing Standards is a connection between text types and social context. The focus is on mastering particular

types of texts rather than why students are writing them, for whom, and to what ends. Anchor Standard W.4 starts to attend to the rhetorical context with an explicit focus on task, purpose, and audience (see Table 1). However, little to no time is spent in the primary CCSS document or appendixes connecting Standards W.1–W.3 with Standard W.4. We suspect that this will contribute to a continued pedagogical emphasis on text types such as narrative, personal essay, and memoir (often called *genres* in schools) that is already common across elementary writing curricula (McCarthy, Woodard, & Kang, 2014). In such curricula, there is not necessarily an audience beyond teachers and classmates or a purpose beyond mastering the text types.

Gallagher (2011) made the case that "we must move beyond the narrowly prescribed school writing discourses found in most school districts and stretch them into areas that can be readily applied

**Table 1**  
**Text Types and Purposes in the Common Core Anchor Standards for Writing**

The Standards Explicitly Say	If You Dig Deeper	What the Standards Do Not Address
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ "Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and sufficient evidence" (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.1).<sup>a</sup></li> <li>■ "Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content" (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2).<sup>a</sup></li> <li>■ "Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences" (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3).<sup>a</sup></li> <li>■ "Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience" (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4).<sup>a</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ "The narrative category does not include all the possible forms of creative writing, such as many types of poetry. The Standards leave the inclusion and evaluation of other such forms to teacher discretion."<sup>b</sup></li> <li>■ "Skilled writers many times use a blend of these three text types to accomplish their purposes."<sup>c</sup></li> <li>■ "While all three text types are important, the Standards put particular emphasis on students' ability to write sound arguments on substantive topics and issues, as this ability is critical to college and career readiness."<sup>c</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Argument as an "emphasized" text type is contested.</li> <li>■ A focus on text types may neglect important social aspects of writing (e.g., audience, understandings of how texts do things in the world).</li> </ul>
<p><sup>a</sup>National Governors Association Center for Best Practices &amp; Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010a). <i>Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects</i> (p. 41). Washington, DC: Authors. <sup>b</sup>National Governors Association Center for Best Practices &amp; Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010b). <i>Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects: Appendix A</i> (p. 23). Washington, DC: Authors. <sup>c</sup>National Governors Association Center for Best Practices &amp; Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010b). <i>Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects: Appendix A</i> (p. 24). Washington, DC: Authors.</p>		

in the world” (p. 7). He went on to describe how he helps his high school students become “real-world writers” by moving his instruction beyond text types toward “real-world writing purposes”: to express and reflect, inform and explain, evaluate and judge, inquire and explore, analyze and interpret, take a stand and propose a solution (p. 10).

Inherent in this type of approach, we think, is a sociocultural focus on *genre* that is quite different from a focus on *text types*. Miller (1984) argued that genres, or “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” (p. 159), are more about the social actions texts are used to accomplish than the forms they take. Sociocultural teachers pay attention to the kind of work and learning accomplished during the production of written genres, not just the surface features of the textual form. They move beyond asking if writing looks right to understanding what students are doing and accomplishing with their writing. As Bazerman and Prior (2005) put it, “learning genres involves learning to act—with other people, artifacts, and environments, all of which are themselves in ongoing processes of change and development” (p. 147).

### From “Using Technology to Produce and Publish” to “New Media Literacies”

Explicit in the Writing Standards is a recognition that students should be given opportunities to use

technology and digital media. This is seen in two of the 10 Anchor Standards as well as the standards for specific grade levels that correspond with these Anchor Standards (see Table 2). Technology is also mentioned in the introduction to the Standards. When a portrait is provided of students who are regarded as college and career ready, one of the “capacities of a literate individual” is described as follows: “They use technology and digital media strategically and capably” (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010a, p. 7). This idea is echoed and extended in the notes on range and content of student writing.

This, however, is all that the Writing Standards have to say about technology and digital media. Educators are left to interpret the meaning of the Standards and to decide how to incorporate technology into literacy instruction.

The open-endedness of the Common Core’s stance toward technologies provides teachers with the opportunity to integrate technologies in whatever way is most meaningful for their students. However, because there is much room for interpretation, there is likely to be wide variation in students’ experiences with technology and digital media. For example, Writing Anchor Standard 6, using technology to “produce and publish” and to “interact and collaborate” (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010a, p. 41), might be interpreted by educators in terms of traditional literacy practices. This might involve

**Table 2**  
**Using Technology in the Common Core Anchor Standards for Writing**

The Standards Explicitly Say	If You Dig Deeper	What the Standards Do Not Address
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ “Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.6).<sup>a</sup></li> <li>■ “Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.8).<sup>a</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Students “use technology and digital media strategically and capably.”<sup>b</sup></li> <li>■ Students “need to be able to use technology strategically when creating, refining, and collaborating on writing.”<sup>c</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ New literacies, including cultural competencies and social practices (e.g., play, performance, appropriation, networking), are critical 21st-century learnings.<sup>d</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>a</sup>National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010a). *Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects* (p. 41). Washington, DC: Authors. <sup>b</sup>National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010a). *Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects* (p. 7). Washington, DC: Authors. <sup>c</sup>National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010a). *Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects* (p. 63). Washington, DC: Authors. <sup>d</sup>Knobel, M., & Lankshear, C. (Eds.). (2007). *A new literacies sampler*. New York, NY: Peter Lang.



a class using an interactive whiteboard to cooperatively write a letter, students posting a reading response on a blog that may be read by other members of the class, or children typing up a final draft after composing away from the computer. Although these practices involve new technologies, they largely mirror past practices without the use of digital technologies.

Alternatively, Writing Anchor Standard 6 might be interpreted with a broader perspective, taking account of the changing social and cultural practices that new technologies afford. Students might visit a fan-fiction website with thousands of active members, share a story based on a popular novel, and comment on the work of other young authors. Yet another example might involve groups of participants from different countries composing and creating a movie together about a social justice issue relevant to their own lives, which might be viewed by a wide audience around the world. Although aspects of these practices may have been possible in the past, there is much that is new in terms of composing, audience, and feedback. Potentially, then, writing tasks involving technology may replicate or transform traditional school practices—and, in doing so, may narrow or expand students' literate lives.

Similarly, there is a broad scope for interpretation of Writing Anchor Standard 8. From a traditional perspective, students might be directed to paraphrase text in their own words and use standard forms of citations. They may be asked to consider the author's perspective and cross-check among different sources. All of these considerations may be important for academic writing; however, practices associated with new technologies further complicate issues of credibility, accuracy, and authorship (Warschauer & Grimes, 2007). For example, the crowdsourcing used in Wikipedia, a site often dismissed in schools, has been shown to produce material that is often more up-to-date and reliable than widely accepted alternatives, such as textbooks and encyclopedias (Anthony, Smith, & Williamson, 2009).

The concept of plagiarism is also more complex than it is often presented in schools. Although it is vital that students understand that they must not blindly copy material and present it as their own, they should also have opportunities to interrogate the complicated issues associated with plagiarism. The digital world has made the remix of resources easier than ever before. Authors take up the stories and characters of other authors to create new plots

on fan-fiction sites; they change the lyrics of popular songs or alter videos; they circulate memes—images or other cultural artifacts—that are mimicked and transformed by others, usually for satirical effect. These practices involve expertise and creativity and are usually highly responsive to audience and purpose. In other words, they promote many of the capacities of a literate individual valued in colleges and careers.

In the discussion of these two Anchor Standards, it is possible to recognize a wide variety of the technological tools and applications that might be used in schools: blogs, websites, cameras, and video editing programs, for example. More importantly, however, it is possible to see many different social practices that might or might not be available to students. Sociocultural educators not only attend to the technical aspects of new technologies but also—and, we would argue, more importantly—to the different social practices made possible or easier with digital technologies. Knobel and Lankshear (2007) made this distinction by referring to the “new ‘technical stuff’ and new ‘ethos stuff’” (p. 7).

The new “technical stuff” includes different hardware, technical tools, and programs; the new “ethos stuff” includes different conceptions of participation, production, and publication. In schools, there are many examples of the use of new technology without corresponding changes in conceptions of participation, production, and publication (Vojak, Kline, Cope, McCarthey, & Kalantzis, 2011). For instance, tablets are used to complete worksheets, homework is submitted through e-mail, and the teacher directs collaborative composing on interactive whiteboards. While new technologies are employed, traditional approaches are maintained; consequently, valuable opportunities for engaging students in literacy and learning are lost.

### ***From “Conventions and Standard English” to “Cultivating Asset-Based Perspectives on Language Use”***

The conventions of Standard English are primarily covered in three Common Core Anchor Standards for Language. Anchor Standards L.1 and L.2 cover traditional sorts of school content related to mastery of conventions in writing (e.g., possessives, tense, nouns), and Anchor Standard L.3 acknowledges language differences across contexts and focuses on teaching students to make appropriate choices (see Table 3). In accompanying text, the Standards give more information about what they mean in L.3 by

**Table 3**  
**Conventions and Standard English in the Common Core Anchor Standards for Language**

The Standards Explicitly Say	If You Dig Deeper	What the Standards Do Not Address
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ “Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.1).<sup>a</sup></li> <li>■ “Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.2).<sup>a</sup></li> <li>■ “Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening” (CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.3).<sup>a</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Specific grade-level suggestions for L.3 help students understand and acknowledge language variety.</li> <li>■ “Grammar and usage instruction should acknowledge the many varieties of English that exist and address differences in grammatical structure and usage between these varieties in order to help students make purposeful language choices in their writing and speaking (Fogel &amp; Ehri, 2000; Wheeler &amp; Swords, 2004).”<sup>b</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ TSG is hard for students to learn and has little impact on writing.</li> <li>■ Social and cultural norms—including racism, classism, and sexism—dictate which language codes and conventions have power and are valued in school and society (i.e., Standard English).</li> <li>■ <i>Language difference</i> does not mean <i>language deficit</i>.</li> <li>■ Students whose home language or dialect is not Standard English have valuable and broad linguistic resources and repertoires.</li> </ul>
<p><sup>a</sup>National Governors Association Center for Best Practices &amp; Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010a). <i>Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects</i> (p. 51). Washington, DC: Authors. <sup>b</sup>National Governors Association Center for Best Practices &amp; Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010b). <i>Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects: Appendix A</i> (p. 29). Washington, DC: Authors.</p>		

applying “knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts” (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010a, p. 51). Appendix A of the CCSS, for example, acknowledges multiple varieties of English and offers some pedagogical suggestions (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010b). However, the Standards do not explicitly acknowledge how language varieties are embedded with power (or not), acknowledge what the implications are for students, or offer advice on how to effectively teach conventions and grammar.

**Grammar Is Hard for Students to Learn and Has Little Impact on Writing.** Although the content from Anchor Standards L.1 and L.2 is familiar to all teachers as an aspect of teaching writing, Smith, Chevillie, and Hillocks (2006) documented multiple studies showing that students have difficulty learning traditional school grammar (TSG; Macauley, 1947) and that TSG has no impact on student writing (Hillocks & Smith, 2003). They also explained that TSG fails to describe the way language actually works because it does not attend to “many crucial features of English (e.g., phonology, morphology, and pitch, stress, and juncture)” (Smith et al., 2006, p. 264). Tasks often used in TSG pedagogy, such as identifying

parts of speech, are very difficult without context information.

**Recognizing Multiple Grammars.** For linguists, a grammar explains how language works; in schools, though, we often prescribe a particular grammar, with a focus on how to do it the right or correct way. The Standard English or TSG that is advocated in the Standards and taught in schools prescribes one English grammar above all others—the one that is most typically associated with middle-class white speakers.

However, this is only one of multiple grammars, or rule systems, governing the English language. For example, if a speaker of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) writes, “We be walking to the park after school,” a linguist would be interested in how the writer uses the rules of AAVE in this sentence—in this case, the unconjugated form of *to be* to refer to regularly occurring actions. Linguists refer to this grammar rule as the “habitual *be*.” From a linguistic perspective, it is neither right nor wrong to use the habitual *be*; from many teachers’ perspectives, though, it is incorrect (see Dyson & Smitherman, 2009, for more examples). Consistent with a sociocultural perspective, Anchor Standard

L.3 and Appendix A of the CCSS clearly acknowledge language varieties and multiple grammars and might suggest that teachers instead acknowledge these differences and talk with students about differences in the ways we talk in AAVE but write in Standard English.

### **Moving Beyond Negotiating Language Difference to an Asset-Based Perspective on Nondominant Language Use.**

The Standards suggest that language use differs across contexts (e.g., written vs. spoken, academic vs. everyday, discipline vs. discipline) and claim that effective writers are able to judge when it is most appropriate to use different kinds of language. For example, in grade 3, students are expected to “recognize and observe differences between the conventions of spoken and written standard English”; in grade 4, they should “differentiate between contexts that call for formal English...and situations where informal discourse is appropriate”; and in grade 5, they are to “compare and contrast the varieties of English (e.g., dialects, registers) used in stories, dramas, or poems” (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010a, p. 29). This focus on appropriate choices, which sometimes employ techniques such as “contrastive analysis” (Wheeler & Swords, 2004, p. 474), are visible in Appendix A of the CCSS (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010b). Appendix A recognizes and encourages the negotiation of language varieties and is in line with “research that continues to indicate how the negotiation of dialectal variety in the context of meaningful reading activities and writing processes support literacy development” (Smith et al., 2006, p. 265).

However, the Standards don’t extend this line of thinking to name various grammars as equally legitimate; explicitly address how our ideas about “proper” grammar are related to culture, race, and power (Delpit, 1995; Ehrenworth & Vinton, 2005); or acknowledge language difference and plurality as a potential resource rather than a deficit. For example, teachers could simultaneously use a contrastive approach to ask students to pay attention to and negotiate the differences between “street” and “classroom” language use and also privilege and advocate the latter as more standard, proper, or correct. In other words, this pedagogy does not explicitly encourage the careful examination of deficit views about language, race, and class.

Acknowledging language difference, then, is not the same as taking a resource-based perspective on nondominant language use. This is important because researchers have shown “how teachers’

assumptions of deficit undermine language learners’ esteem and developmental progress” (Smith et al., 2006, p. 265). Another limitation of the contrastive grammar approach advocated in the Common Core is an assumption of language separation in how multilingual people use language. In the fields of linguistic anthropology, biliteracy, and bilingual education, there is a recognition that bilingual people do not function as two monolinguals moving back and forth between distinct languages and grammars. Rather, their linguistic resources are intermingled and inseparable.

Sociocultural teachers acknowledge that multiple legitimate grammars exist; explicitly examine the relationships among language, culture, and power; and understand that multilingual speakers and learners draw from many intertwined linguistic resources rather than simply switching between them.

## **Applying Sociocultural Understandings to Pedagogical Practices**

In Table 4, we synthesize sociocultural understandings about writing in the key areas identified in this paper. Then, we provide questions to prompt reflection and inform or transform pedagogical shifts from “text types and purposes” to genre, from “technology to produce and publish” to new media literacies, and from “conventions and Standard English” to asset-based perspectives on grammar and language use.

## **Toward Socioculturally Informed Writing Instruction**

Although contextual and cultural issues are widely recognized in research as important for writing development, these issues are given limited explicit attention in the Standards (Graham et al., 2015). Accepting and implementing the Standards as is, then, has the potential to disproportionately disenfranchise nondominant speakers and students of color. Because educators are often working without much professional support for writing instruction and Standards implementation, in this article, we have offered lessons from sociocultural research to help with this task. As writing researchers, literacy teacher educators, and former elementary and middle school teachers, we attest that sociocultural theory provides a valuable lens for reading the Standards and has the potential to expand students’ opportunities as writers and learners.

**Table 4**  
**Key Sociocultural Understandings and Questions to Guide Pedagogical Reflection**

From “Text Types and Purposes” to “Genre”	From “Using Technology to Produce and Publish” to “New Media Literacies”	From “Conventions and Standard English” to “Asset-Based Perspectives on Language Use”
<p>Writing is more than words on a page; writers and their texts do things to, for, and with people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What opportunities might I offer my students for investigating how authors are influenced by particular social, cultural, geographical, political, or historical factors?</li> <li>■ How can I challenge my students to read texts from different perspectives (e.g., students compare and contrast a diverse range of texts around a central theme)?</li> </ul>	<p>New technologies allow for broader structures of participation, feedback, and collaboration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How might new technologies be used to increase my students’ opportunities for participation and collaboration?</li> <li>■ How might new technologies be used to increase the volume and quality of feedback that my students receive?</li> <li>■ How might I modify writing projects to take advantage of the affordances of new technologies?</li> </ul>	<p>There are multiple grammars in the English language that are equally valid and always evolving; our beliefs about “correct” grammar and language use are influenced by culture and power dynamics.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What opportunities might I give my students to investigate multiple grammars (traditional school grammar, their heritage language(s), etc.)?</li> <li>■ How might students come to understand how race, class, and culture influence our beliefs and ideas about language?</li> <li>■ How might I show students that I value multiple grammars and languages, particularly nondominant ones?</li> </ul>
<p>There is great diversity within and across genres.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What opportunities do I provide for my students to investigate real-world texts?</li> <li>■ In what ways do I illuminate the variable, fluid nature of genre to my students?</li> <li>■ In what ways do I show my students that writing is about making reasoned choices for specific purposes, not replicating a fixed set of features?</li> </ul>	<p>New technologies facilitate meaning making in multiple modalities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How might my students investigate and compose effective multimodal texts?</li> <li>■ How might they use different devices for collecting, composing, and publishing ideas?</li> <li>■ How might they compose with texts in different modalities and investigate the ways that these different texts convey meaning?</li> </ul>	<p>Asset-based pedagogies encourage nondominant speakers to draw from their many, intertwined linguistic resources.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ In writing, how can I support students to draw from their multiple linguistic resources, particularly those who are drawing from languages or dialects that I am not familiar with and that few or no other classmates speak?</li> <li>■ What assessment and evaluation methods most clearly support translanguaging in the writing classroom?</li> </ul>
<p>Cultural and disciplinary norms influence our ideas about genre.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ How can students explore cultural and disciplinary norms about what makes “good” writing?</li> <li>■ How might I explore and challenge my own biases about what makes “good” writing?</li> <li>■ How might I encourage feedback and evaluation to students’ writing from a broad panel of readers that represent multiple cultural and disciplinary perspectives?</li> </ul>	<p>New technologies provide expanded opportunities for play and remix.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ What opportunities might I provide my students for drawing on popular culture?</li> <li>■ How can I help students draw from their own cultural and linguistic resources?</li> <li>■ What dominant media discourses might students explore and rewrite?</li> </ul>	

Furthermore, we hope that the processes outlined in this article—including (1) identifying what the Standards explicitly say, implicitly say, and don’t say; (2) comparing the perspectives advocated in

the Standards to those we value; and (3) researching theoretically grounded pedagogical supplements and alternatives rather than accepting the Standards at face value—can support educators to



## TAKE ACTION!

1. Survey your students. Find out how they use writing out of school and what digital tools they use to compose and for what purposes.
2. Ask your students to act as researchers observing and recording language and literacy practices in their homes and communities.
3. Examine and write real-world texts with your students and identify the texts' purpose, form, audience, and so on.
4. Analyze a Common Core-aligned writing curriculum used in your classroom or school. Consider how activities support concepts such as genre, new literacies, and linguistic repertoires. What might be changed to ensure that these concepts are brought to life for students?

critically examine standards and curriculum more broadly. Such work is particularly important in an era of standardization, and we believe it is a cornerstone of our profession.

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- New literacies and Connected Learning: [connectedlearning.tv](http://connectedlearning.tv)
- PBS’s “Do You Speak American?” video and website: [www.pbs.org/speak/education/curriculum/college/aae/#keyideas](http://www.pbs.org/speak/education/curriculum/college/aae/#keyideas)

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