

Metaphors, Frames, and Fact (Checks) about the Common Core

This article interrogates some metaphors that CCSS proponents have used as arguments to characterize CCSS, and then checks the facts that others have amassed around the issue.

The Power of Metaphors

We spotted this classic at the 2013 NCTE Annual Convention in Boston: a black shirt, the front of which read, in Star Wars–inspired font, “Metaphors Be With You.” Having seen it in the exhibit hall many times over the years, we first chuckled and passed it by as a pretty geeky English teacher gift. But as we spent more time at the Convention, a convention in which the hallways buzzed with talk about the Common Core, we came to revere the shirt, the English teacher model, and its designer. As teachers of English language arts, we know that metaphors have force. They are not just words we talk with, or clever embellishments for our writing; they are frames that we live by. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson explain:

The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor. (3)

The metaphors we use not only *describe* us and our activities, they *shape* us and direct our efforts. Like picture frames around a scene, they make certain perceptions possible and obscure others; they make certain roles available and close off others. This raises the stakes for understanding metaphors,

then, when they arise in public discourse: much more than a demonstration of literary prowess, the careful reading of metaphor is a way of more consciously and responsibly living our lives as educators and citizens. Perhaps we are making too much of our transaction with the T-shirt, but we think the designer’s mashup of Star Wars and Lakoff is an inspired populist composition. May the force to name, influence, and address our actions throughout our lives reside with each literate person. Seize the metaphor, and seize the day away from “the Empire.” The English teacher modeling the shirt assigned this text to NCTE members, encouraging English language arts teachers to form rebel alliances through the force of metaphor to struggle against the privatization of public school reform. Inspired by this text message, we work together to bring metaphors of critique and metaphors of hope to bear on the Common Core State Standards initiative.

Metaphors and the Common Core

As we write this article, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have found their way into law, professional organizations, and classrooms in some states, while in others a fiery mix of politicians, corporations, Tea Partiers, parents, and educators argue for and against them. One challenge when writing about contemporary events is that they keep unfolding even as you write about them. Since we began talking about metaphors and the Common Core State Standards initiative (CCSS), over the weeks and months it takes to get an article from

idea to press in a print journal, CCSS has continued to make headlines: Indiana dropped its commitment entirely, and Florida, Georgia, and Arizona withdrew from the official testing scheme. In Brooklyn and Harlem, parents boycotted the second administration of New York's version of CCSS testing, and parent and teacher groups confronted Education Superintendent King at every stop of his CCSS informational tour of New York State. During Congressional reauthorization hearings for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Senator Pat Roberts (KS) offered this language in an amendment:

(a) In General.—An officer or employee of the Federal Government shall not directly or indirectly, through grants, contracts, or other cooperative agreements under this Act (including through any waiver provided under the Secretary's authority pursuant to section 9401)—

(1) mandate, direct, or control a State, local educational agency, or school's specific instructional content, academic standards, assessments, curriculum, or program of instruction (including through any requirement, direction, or mandate to adopt the Common Core State Standards developed under the Common Core State Standards Initiative or any other academic standards common to a significant number of States)

(<http://beta.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/senate-bill/1974/text>)

We cannot say with certainty what the status of the CCSS will be as you read this article. What we can say for sure is that the CCSS are not a “done deal.” Discussions and decisions about their origins and use are still active and evolving—even in those states where textbooks already say “Common Core aligned” on their covers and in which students have been taking CCSS-aligned tests. Inside and outside of education, discussions about CCSS continue.

Those discussions are supported by many millions of dollars and by metaphors. Teachers control few of these dollars or metaphors. Rather, advocates for CCSS, often without direct experience in English

language arts classrooms, have the force of cash and metaphor behind them. In this article, we will lay out for examination some of the metaphors that CCSS proponents have used as arguments to characterize CCSS, along with the roles teachers should take in connection to each. To be fair to the metaphors, our treatment relies on direct quotation and CCSS Anchor Standard 8: “Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.” Toward that end, we examine how the metaphors work to name and frame an issue for the public, and then, check the facts that others have amassed around that issue. Few of these metaphors seem valid, relevant, or sufficient as descriptions, influences, and directions for our work in English language arts; therefore, they are a potentially dangerous public force used against the possibilities available in other metaphors. We hope not only to call into question the origins and effects of the CCSS but also to suggest a way of proceeding in which we are attentive to the power of metaphor in shaping the data and are able to use it ourselves with equal deliberateness and strength.

Metaphor: Education as a Race

[Asian nations] want their kids to excel because they understand that whichever country out-educates the other is going to out-compete us in the future. So that's what we're up against. That's what's at stake—nothing less than our primacy in



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the world. . . . And I want to commend all of you for acting collectively through the National Governor's Association to develop common academic standards that will better position our students for success. (Obama)

In his talk to the National Governors Association in 2010, President Obama offers an implicit metaphor to explain the rationale for CCSS, its urgency, and its origins. He frames education as a race (his chief reform will be named Race to the Top). And he characterizes it as a race we are losing. We are behind, he suggests, in preparing for the global innovation economy. He frames the issue of school reform as self-preservation: If we don't hurry up, then we will lose the race and lose our standing in the world. He positions a common rigorous education as the engine for quickening the country's pace in this race.

We've heard this all before. Thirty years ago, *A Nation at Risk* called American schooling the equivalent of "an act of war." The answer at that time was better high school curriculum (Ravitch, *The Death*). Fifteen years ago, the Reading Excellence Act named the American "reading crisis" as the culprit and offered scientifically based instructions as the solution (Shannon). Five years ago, NCTE told us that "shift happens" and only a swing toward digital media could keep Americans perched at the lumpy center of the flat world (NCTE).

Each reminder was careful to acknowledge America's past educational exceptionality. Between the Great War and the Best War, American schools outpaced technology, preparing citizens with the knowledge and dispositions of a manufacturing nation and a growing middle class. Since the Vietnam War ended, however, the world economy has changed at an ever-increasing pace, and as Obama explained, others have usurped our educational advantage and, therefore, threaten our economic future (Goldin and Katz). "We are behind," they tell us, and they point toward continuing mediocre international academic test scores to demonstrate that a common core is needed.

Fact Check:

1. The US economy is still twice the size of its nearest competitor. We are not behind economically (Reich).

2. American workers' productivity has increased dramatically since the 1990s, but the increase was/is not dependent on educational attainment (Chang) and the benefits have not been distributed evenly (Krugman, "Why").
3. The global economy does not require new skills from all workers, and the United States produces more highly skilled workers than the US economy requires (US Bureau of Labor Statistics).
4. International test scores show a two-tiered school system in America (Berliner). In schools serving primarily middle- and upper-middle-class communities, American students score higher on reading and math tests than students from other nations, and schools serving communities with high rates of poverty produce test scores among the lowest nations. Our rankings are over-determined by America's greater tolerance for poverty among its citizens than other industrialized nations (Carnoy and Rothstein).

Where does the "race" metaphor position teachers? Certainly not as champion athletes. Instead, here teachers are themselves behind, running with American students at the back of the pack. This begs the question, "Behind whom?" Some dream team of fitter, faster teachers in other countries? Some group of future teachers (Younger ones? Smarter ones?) supplied through alternate-certification avenues such as Teach For America? Or perhaps teachers are coaches alongside the track, shaking their heads in shame as their students lose the race.

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Metaphor: The CCSS as a Building, Constructed of Evidence

While sometimes I've been called an architect of these standards, I think their true architecture is evidence. That's the binding secret of the standards.

During an interview conversation (Resmovits), David Coleman, founder of Student Achievement Partners and now president of the College Board, suggests that he was simply a conduit for

the truth behind President Obama’s optimism—“common academic standards that will better position our students for success.” By implication, Coleman argues that anyone attending to “evidence” would have designed CCSS as they appear in their anchor forms. He himself is not an architect; instead, he is simply following the blueprint offered by evidence, evidence as strong (and unambiguous) as the steel or timber that frame a building. Within this metaphor, CCSS is imagined as a solid, sound building, and matters that preceded its construction—such as its design and funding—are dispensed with. This evidence, portrayed as dense and unbending, offers those who use the metaphor and those who accept it a sense of reality about what American high school graduates need to know to make their ways in the world. To accept CCSS is to grasp reality; to question them or the initiative is being unrealistic.

Fact Check:

1. “The Common Core standards have been adopted in 46 states and the District of Columbia without any field test. They are being imposed on the children of this nation despite the fact that no one has any idea how they will affect students, teachers, or schools. We are a nation of guinea pigs, almost all trying an unknown new program at the same time” (Ravitch, “Why”).
2. “So, in a literal sense, the progressions in the CCSS for ELA do not have a rich and elaborate research base to support them—at least to support every transition in anchor standard from one grade to the next” (Pearson).
3. “Contrary to previous reports, we find that text complexity has either risen or stabilized over the past half century; these findings have significant implications for the justification of the CCSS as well as for our understanding of a ‘decline’ within American schooling more generally” (Gamson, Lu, and Eckert).
4. “Reading First did not produce a statistically significant impact on student reading comprehension test scores” (Gamse et al.), but “in the Common Core Standards released in 2010, that model occupies a significant place in the Foundation Skills section of early reading” (Calfee).

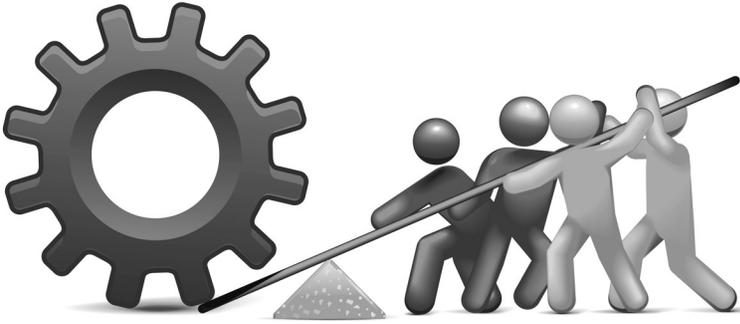
5. If there were evidence that standards positioned all students for success, then the achievement gap within states should have closed markedly since the passage of NCLB (Cuban). However, “the achievement gap between children from high- and low-income families is roughly 30 to 40 percent larger among children born in 2001 than among those born twenty-five years earlier” (Reardon). Moreover, there is little evidence to support the conclusion that a single set of standards across the country will change this outcome because among students’ scores on the National Assessment for Educational Progress test “within state variation is four or five times larger than the variation between states” (Loveless).

If the CCSS are conceived as built, and the building materials as evidence, where are teachers? Perhaps, most optimistically, as hard-hatted construction workers, hammering together nails and wood handed them by a supervisor or reading blueprints drafted by distant architects. Or perhaps teachers are simply occupants of the building, arriving only after its completion and having no role in its construction. Either way, teachers are not architects in this frame, and neither are they supervisors. Nor are they consulted in the design: the design is a *fait accompli*, determined by the evidence itself without named, visible human architects.

Metaphor: CCSS as a Team Effort Originating with the States

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort that established a single set of clear educational standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts and mathematics that states voluntarily adopt.

Found in the Frequently Asked Questions section of the Common Core State Standards Initiative website, this statement addresses the question, “What is the Common Core State Standards Initiative?” The statement reflects *e pluribus unum* spirit, in which the states voluntarily joined together as a team to produce a common product. This metaphor relies in part on the lack of a clear role for federal government in education: because education is not mentioned directly in the US Constitution,



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it falls under the control of state governments. For federal officials to become involved in education, they must invoke the General Welfare Clause in the Constitution that enables them to tax and spend to accomplish goals and the Commerce Clause to regulate interstate economic activity (see the first metaphor).

The unnamed author of the website answer quoted above implies that state officials posed the problem for which CCSS is the solution. That is, the metaphor suggests that states identified a common problem—lack of clarity about what to teach—and then teamed up. As a team, the metaphor suggests, they then sought a single set of graduation standards to meet the needs of all students in all states. President Obama raised this same metaphor in 2010, praising those officials for “acting collectively through the National Governor’s Association.” David Brooks reiterated this version of the story in his April 2014 editorial on the CCSS, calling the standards effort “state-led” while admitting that financial backing came from the private sector and “encouragement” from the federal government.

The teamwork, “together” metaphor frames the development and implementation of CCSS as a national grassroots movement carried out by eager volunteers. It also implies that members of the team—states—desired to be the same, in that given their supposedly common problem of desiring standards, it was somehow inevitable that the solution be *shared and uniform* standards. States would then willingly, voluntarily decide to play along with the team, doing things in common (at the national level) that were previously done independently by states.

Fact Check:

1. When the Elementary and Secondary Education Act was first authorized in 1965, state officials insisted on a clause that prohibits the federal government’s ability to “exercise any direction, supervision, or control over curriculum, program of instruction, administration or personnel, or over the selection of any instructional materials in any educational institution or school system” (Public Law 89-10, Section 604). Texas and Alaska governors mentioned this clause when they declined to participate in CCSS.
2. The National Governors Association (NGA) had previously attempted to broker national academic standards in the 1990s through Goals 2000, America 2000, and Educate America legislation. Federal officials and legislators rejected the standards that professional organizations produced, including a set from NCTE (McCollum-Clark).
3. In 1996, NGA formed Achieve, Inc., a private nonprofit, to broker world-class high school graduation standards. Achieve produced *Ready or Not* with clearly articulated career and college ready graduation requirements. From 2006 to 2012, Achieve monitored states’ alignment with these standards annually (*Closing the Expectations Gap*). By 2008, Achieve discerned sufficient agreement among state standards to begin the Common Core initiative (*Out of Many, One*). In 2009, Achieve began its work as CCSS project manager, hiring Student Achievement Partners to write the ELA standards. In 2010, Achieve directed the PARCC version of CCSS tests, and in 2011 it managed the Next Generation (K–12) Science Standards.
4. Achieve’s original and continued funding came from the Battelle, Gates, Cisco, GE, JP Morgan, and Hewitt foundations and Boeing, IBM, Lumina, and State Farm corporations.
5. According to the NGA, no teachers were included among the 14-member working group to write the ELA standards. Doranna Tindle, an instructional performance coach from the Friendship Public Charter School, was the only school representative on the

18-member feedback group charged with providing research in support of the standards (National Governors Association).

6. To encourage states to accept CCSS voluntarily: President Obama hinted that he would link Title 1 funding to acceptance (Klein); the Department of Education awarded extra points for acceptance in the Race to the Top competition (Lewin); the Secretary of Education granted states waivers from adequate yearly progress requirements in exchange for acceptance of CCSS; and the federal government provided \$350 million to two consortia to develop CCSS assessments.
7. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation poured hundreds of millions of dollars into the production of CCSS, the brokering of consensus around them, and advocacy for the implementation, including tens of millions to the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers and Achieve; millions to American Teachers Federation, National Writing Project, Student Achievement Partners, and Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; and hundreds of thousands to Education Commission of the States, WestEd, and the National Council of Teachers of English.

Where does this metaphor leave teachers? If CCSS is a voluntary team effort by state governors, then teachers are not members of the team, just residents of the states charged with carrying out what those who “made the team” have decided. It leaves

teachers—and everyone else not “on the team”—sitting on the bleachers just watching, at best. From the many other people with potential stakes in education—individual parents, voters, business owners, residents of states—they are indistinguishable, possessing no special expertise or insight into the development and implementation of the stan-

dards. And it leaves teachers who raise questions about the Common Core or even oppose it as team-breakers, promoting disunity.

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Metaphor: Education as a Market

Identifying common standards is just the starting point. We’ll only know if this effort has succeeded when the curriculum and the tests are aligned to these standards. . . . When the tests are aligned with the common standards, the curriculum will line up as well, and it will unleash a powerful market of people providing services for better teaching. For the first time, there will be a large uniform base of customers looking at using products that can help every kid learn and every teacher get better. (Gates)

Speaking to the National Association of State Legislatures in 2009, Bill Gates explained the metaphor of the market in CCSS as educational policy. Voluntary curriculum reform of the 1980s, public efforts at developing national standards during the 1990s, and scientific instruction required in NCLB have not enabled America to pick up its educational pace, argued Gates, because the public school market was not sufficiently large to attract entrepreneurs to compete to address and eventually solve the problem of America falling behind. By implication, the market metaphor frames the public school establishment as the problem. State control of public education, the thinking goes, splinters consumption; teacher education through a college system blocks consensus; teachers unions stymie innovation; and community control keep much of the public complacent about their local schools. All of these things make education not profitable to invest in, and those with big capital (and by implication, the real good ideas) then stay away. Thus schools can’t/won’t change.

With CCSS alignment, however, the American public educational system will benefit from the power of markets “for the first time.” Common testing on a single set of standards will mean that educational products—be they curricula, tests, devices, or any other products one might sell for use in education—can now be produced in a single form for a higher number of end users than was previously possible. With those pesky local variations between states removed, education customers will more readily accept (and spend their money on) the same products—reducing inefficiency and enhancing profitability. Seeing that they stand to make a profit under these improved conditions, “people providing

services for better teaching” (companies) can mine test scores as big data and analyze them to discover new goods and services “that can help every kid learn and every teacher get better”—and help the companies further increase profits. Competition among entrepreneurs will ensure the most effective and efficient means at the least cost will eventually control the market, that is, until more effective and efficient technologies are invented to replace them.

Fact Check:

1. The K–12 public education market was over \$1 trillion annually in the United States *before* advent of CCSS (Hess and Horn). Pearson Inc. had \$4.16 billion in sales in North America with \$857 million in profits in 2012 (Pearson PLC). After health care, education is the largest sector of the US economy.
2. Health care in the United States operates largely as a private sector market—62 percent of hospitals are nonprofit, 20 percent are government run, and 18 percent are for-profit businesses. According to the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine (Woolf and Aron), America ranks at or near the bottom among industrialized nations in prevalence of infant mortality, heart and lung disease, sexually transmitted infections, adolescent pregnancies, injuries, homicides, and disability. Life expectancy ranks 27th out of 34 industrialized nations (OECD) and 46th of 48 countries in health care efficiency (Bloomberg). The Kaiser Family Foundation reported that Americans spent more on health care per capita than any other nation (17 percent of the country’s GDP).
3. Since the reauthorization of ESEA as No Child Left Behind, new private/public educational bureaucracies have emerged to accommodate the increased requirements for standardized testing (Saltman). Large organizations have formed around the production, preparation, administration, scoring, and (student) remediation of these tests. Each of the bureaucracies and the companies that serve them organize to lobby state and federal government to ensure their continuation and profitability (for example, see Jeb Bush’s Foundation for Excellence in Education at <http://excelined.org>).
4. In his *New York Times* op-ed piece, “Sympathy for the Luddites,” economist Paul Krugman explained the economic and social consequences when technology replaces people who had previously acquired highly valued skills through education. He noted lawyers lost to information technologies and surgeons to robotics, but did not mention machine scoring of standardized examination essays or Bridge International Academies’ school in a box. He concluded that these market-based events of creative destruction make a mockery of the axiom that more and better education leads to increased income and the possibility of financial security.

Framing public education as a market leaves teachers in the position of consumer. What kind of consumer depends upon your reading. A generous reading would leave teachers as savvy consumers who are empowered to select from an array of instructional and curricular options. Yet the language Gates uses clearly draws the frame in a more exclusive way, in which decision makers outside the classroom (states, districts, schools) select and purchase things that students and teachers will consume together. Further, if education is a market, and providers of educational products stand to profit, then both teachers and kids’ role in education is not only to teach and to learn but also to enrich unseen others.

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Where Does All This Leave Teachers?

The force behind these metaphors is not from ELA teachers or for them. Where are teachers in these metaphors and accompanying arguments for the existence of CCSS and/or for our engagement with it in good faith despite its history and origins? These metaphors offer specific positions for teachers to occupy, sometimes spelled out quite explicitly. As we have argued, they position teachers alongside kids as slow runners, at the back of the pack, too slow to keep up with the fast “real world” or the rest of the world. They position teachers as inside a building they had no say in constructing, or perhaps outside the building altogether. They position

teachers as happily partnering with an “everybody,” of cheering for a team comprising entities that have actually been paid to be there. And they position teachers as consumers of educational products produced elsewhere, or as delivery systems for educational products, where students are the consumers and the ones who stand to profit are elsewhere. How are teachers to maintain integrity within the context of those metaphors?

Integrity in the Context of the CCSS

Anne admits that, until the past few years, she has usually done her best to ignore both CCSS and other standards movements that have preceded it. Teach well, she said, and the standards will take care of themselves. Or, help students become flexibly literate, she said, and test scores will take care of themselves. Or, she thought, I have more important and immediate things to worry about than national policies, or items listed on a state website, or even about a set of binders on the shelves in a school district office; I have students right here in front of me to worry about. Or, she thought, I teach in the suburbs, and students here score high; it’s too bad this reform is affecting poor kids the way it is, but I am not in that context and can’t do much about it without coming across as an uninformed outsider. Or she’d listen to older colleagues around the lunch table, who said “I’ve seen this stuff come and go; the pendulum will swing back the other way; we just have to get through it.” Anne did what many of us have done with standards policies in the past: frame it and contain it using metaphors of her own, like a pendulum swinging from some far-away pivot, or as weather blowing outside a house in which we remain cozy and unaffected.

However, Anne now finds she can no longer ignore the Common Core—and Pat never did. Each of us has many reasons to choose from. The intrusiveness of testing is now so great, the differential impacts on poor kids are so severe, in terms of their getting the worst canned, test-preppy curricula, the ways this links to school turnaround, charters, and other destabilizing actions that disproportionately affect poor kids. Now the tests will evaluate *us*, quite directly, via value added measurement. As parents, we feel that people who know our children should be empowered to make decisions

about our children; as teachers, we think we know some things that should matter in decision making. When we skip right over the CCSS’s origins and intentions and just jump to “how do we deal with it?”, we become complicit in ignoring (or tacitly condoning) the origins and intentions of the CCSS, and we consign ourselves to operating within the spaces defined in those metaphors and how we are positioned in those arguments. For this reason, we can no longer ignore the Common Core with integrity—where integrity means not only doing the right things, but fulfilling the entire sense of that word: completeness, with consistency, doing things in an integrated way, all in one space, with clear boundaries and wholeness.

Metaphors of Acceptance, of “Survivance,” and of Resistance

It may be helpful here to take a look at some of the alternative metaphors that we have heard people use either to do good work within the context of the Common Core or to actively resist it. Are there any here that we want to occupy? Any that we can occupy with integrity?

One metaphor we have heard a colleague use to describe his work connected to Common Core—work that has engaged teachers in vibrant collaborations, that has led to positive changes in writing opportunities for kids—is that of the lever. He talks about “leveraging” Common Core to get into places he might not otherwise be, such as doing district- and statewide professional development. Where otherwise large-scale professional development might have been left to the large textbook companies promising “teacher-proof” curricula for Common Core, he and his colleagues have been able to use Common Core as a lever or (another metaphor) a foot in the door, or an entry point to do good work that they would otherwise like to do but might not otherwise be welcomed to do. The “lever” metaphor has potential, if the Common Core is envisioned as a boulder—the lever not only touches the rock, it moves it, even moves it aside. And it also carries a sense of the small being able to gather greater strength—the genius of the lever as a simple machine is how it makes it possible for someone to move much larger objects that he or she could have with just muscles. But it’s not a rock-crusher. Also,

once we pry aside the boulder, where does it *then* sit? What new way is blocked by it?

Another colleague uses the image of the ship at sea. The broader policy context can be viewed as wind, and we become captains steering a ship. We can harness and use the wind. We can work with it; we can keep a steady course regardless of the shifting directions of the wind. Our boat does offer, too, some safety from occasional storms, in that we might take cover under deck from time to time. (An added layer to this is the sail itself: really it is by blocking the wind, cutting across it, that the sails function to propel the ship. Yet to take a course *too* directly against the wind will capsize our boat altogether.) This offers some good potential: we are agentic captains; we can “ride out the storm” or “stay the course.” Yet it remains that in this metaphor, we depend upon the wind; a ship without wind is becalmed, unable to travel at all. Is this where we want to leave ourselves?

So none of the metaphors gets us all the way out of trouble, and some create even more trouble. It’s not as simple as finding a newer, better metaphor and using it to combat the ones behind CCSS, although that work matters: in fact, there is power available even in noticing and naming the metaphors in both others’ arguments about CCSS and our own. Scholars of Native American literature and rhetoric (e.g., Powell; Vizenor) have talked about “survivance,” a tactic of survival + resistance in which colonial language, metaphors, frames are both taken up and resisted. Powell writes,

I pay close attention to the language of survivance (survival + resistance) that they, consciously or unconsciously, use in order to reimagine and, literally, re-figure “the Indian.” It is this use that I argue transforms their object-status within colonial discourse into a subject-status, a presence instead of an absence. (400)

Here metaphors are taken up and deployed strategically. Their users both use and re-imagine (literally, re-image) the images in the metaphor. They are sometimes willing to occupy those positions the colonizer has offered up in its discourse, when needed for survival or when there is an advantage there, but they maintain agility to shift to new metaphors once there. Where survival implies barely hanging on, survivance encompasses

continuation, sustained presence, resistance that goes beyond reaction.

Our field has a terrific history, a sustained presence if you will, of agentic action in the face of forces that would determine for us what we should teach, how and why. Consider that the circumstances surrounding the founding of NCTE included a desire to resist efforts to shape K–12 English from a few elite university corners, under pressure of a college entrance exam. The minutes of the first NCTE meeting include a resolution to communicate concerns to examiners. Consider also how the first article to appear in *English Journal*, just after the founding of NCTE, offered a strong critique of the institutional conditions for teaching of writing common in their day—conditions that, truth be told, have still not changed much in the ensuing hundred years, even before the arrival of CCSS. The celebrations and recollections commemorating NCTE’s and *EJ*’s hundredth anniversaries, appearing in these pages and in other NCTE publications, tell many stories of our history, but one point they make clear is that NCTE members have always taken a strong interest in and stances relative to the policy forces that influence their work.

As members of NCTE and inheritors of its legacy, we inherit two charges: we are the champions of readers and writers, defending the rights of students for high-quality literacy opportunities, and we are champions of teachers, defending our own rights for reasonable conditions in which to work. As the champions of readers and writers, we are experts in metaphor. As champions of teachers, we need *also* to be experts in metaphor. Metaphors, after all, have as much force to shape our work as teachers as they do to shape the reading and writing experiences of our students.

Thus we offer up these considerations of metaphor as a rhetorical resistance strategy: Name, Frame, Fact (Check), and then Speak Up. Teachers speak up in a range of ways and places, including but not limited to editorials, blogs, communications with parents, at the polls, and via all the other ways of speaking and writing we share with one another and in the communities we inhabit. We speak up alone, and in local groups of two or three or twenty, and in larger groups organizing for collective action. That we do in fact speak up is crucial, and that we “use the force” of metaphor is crucial,

too. As we have tried to model in these pages, we name the metaphors, see what they frame, check facts—seeing where the metaphors go and, where appropriate, bringing out contradictions therein. Then we SAY SO where people can hear us. 

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READWRITETHINK CONNECTION

Lisa Storm Fink, RWT

While the article uses metaphors to talk about education and the Common Core, this lesson plan from ReadWriteThink.org gives examples of how you can use metaphors in the classroom. Useful at key points in a term, such as the beginning or end of the term, this lesson asks students to reflect on their writing process and helps the teacher learn more about students' habits and techniques as writers. Students begin by reading and analyzing the poem "The Writer" by Richard Wilbur, particularly discussing the use of extended metaphor. Students then reflect on their own writing habits, compare themselves as writers to the writer in the poem, and brainstorm possible metaphors for themselves as writers. Finally, students complete one of several recommended projects to extend the metaphor describing themselves as writers. Throughout the process, students share their work in small groups. <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/writing-about-writing-extended-905.html>

the kindness school (beyond the archeology of white people, pt. 2)

it simply happened one day
when the teachers decided
enough was enough

all the boys with OCD
spent the day playing drums
or riding their bicycles

and the introverts sat quietly
smiling periodically in the corners
while the extroverts laughed and laughed

and soon the pleasures became many
as varied as the children themselves
until one day a child stood to proclaim

after reading *Hamlet* all on her own
"I say, we will have no more tests"
to which there was thunderous cheering

yes it seemed simple and obvious enough
the founding of the kindness school
with open doors and children singing

—P. L. Thomas

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