

Aligning Learning Resources to the Common Core Literacy Standards

Early Draft – Prepared by Brandt Redd (Gates Foundation) based on the text of the Common Core State Standards and conversations with people involved in the development of the standards – September 2011

With the advent the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and their adoption by more than 44 states, a number of organizations are developing learning resources and recording the alignment between those resources and standards within the common core.

The Common Core State Standards for Literacy (<http://corestandards.org>) define 10 “Anchor Standards” each for Reading and Writing. In each case, standard 1 represents the student’s ability to extract (reading) or convey (writing) meaning. Standard 10 represents the complexity of the text being read or written. Standards 2-9 represent other specific skills related to reading and writing that might not be applicable to every text.

In a sense, a particular learning activity exists in a two-dimensional space. One dimension is the complexity of the text (standard 10) and the other dimension is the activity (standards 1-9). The same activity is considered more advanced when applied to a more complex text.

The anchor standards alone are specified using “CCR Notation” (College and Career Readiness). Thus, “R.CCR.1” is the anchor standard “Read closely to determine what the text says...” without any indicator of the text complexity. Likewise, “R.CCR.10” is the general strand of effort to read text of increasing complexity.

A standard as applied to a grade level substitutes the grade number for “CCR.” Therefore, “RL.8.10” indicates reading literature (“RL”) at a complexity appropriate for 8th grade (“8”). In this example, “10” indicates standard 10 which is simply the text complexity with no indicator of a particular skill applied to text of that complexity. If one of the other standards (1-9) is used then we have indicators in both dimensions (text complexity and skill.) For example, the “RL.8.1” indicates “Read closely to determine what the text says...” (Standard 1), with text complexity appropriate for 8th grade, applied to literature (“RL”). Thus, when specifying an Anchor Standard skill other than 10, the identifier has elements that include both dimensions – skills and text complexity.

However, text complexity is a continuous scale. (See Core Standards Appendix A for information about rating text complexity.) Grade numbers, such as “8” in the above example, indicate a bracket of complexity and they overlap from grade-to-grade. For example, a single text might be appropriate (though somewhat advanced) for grade 7 while being relatively average in complexity for grade 8. So, when tagging that text (or a related learning activity), references to the same standards for both 7th and 8th grades should be used. Likewise, there might be an additional metadata tag indicating the specific text complexity.

Another factor is appropriateness of a learning objective to a particular text. Anchor standards 1 and 10 apply to all texts. Skills 2-9 may not. This would be indicated by inclusion or omission of alignment indicators relative to each of the standards 2-9.

A final factor is indicating the relationship between a learning resource and the associated standard. In previous conversations we have identified three potential relationships:

- **Requires:** The learning resource requires the skill specified by the associated standard before the student would be able to use it.
- **Teaches:** The learning resource teaches the specified skill.
- **Assesses:** The learning resource assesses the degree to which the student has acquired the specified skill.

When working with literacy standards, particularly reading, there may be a distinction between the source text and a learning activity associated with that text. For example, standard “RL.8.3” reads, “Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action...”. A short story with action or dialog might be “appropriate to teach” “RL.8.3” while a lesson plan involving the short story would “teach” the standard. Meanwhile, a poem involving not action or dialog wouldn’t be appropriate.

So, to the “Requires,” “Teaches” and “Assesses” relationships we might add “Appropriate to teach” – a relationship assigned to source documents.