Literacy Demands of the 21st Century

Janice A. Dole
Utah Center for Reading and Literacy
University of Utah
Overview of My Talk

- How Times Have Changed
- The Common Core State Standards
- The Texts
- The Reading Tasks (Standards)
- The Writing Tasks (Standards)
- Conclusion
In the 20th Century, critical literacy skills were needed only for students who went to college.

In the 1950s and 1960s, for example, students were earmarked and destined for different kinds of work early on in their lives.
How Times Have Changed

- Students were tracked—college training, business training, vocational training.

- Americans could earn a solid income for their families with vocational training.
  - E.g. Detroit auto workers could earn $70-80,000 as a yearly income.
  - My dad earned a living for a family of four as a machinist.
How Times Have Changed

- Today, in 2010, these are not realistic possibilities for us and our children.

- Auto workers do not make the salaries they did 50 years ago. Machinists do not make the salaries they did 50 years ago.
Karoly and Panis (2004) identify four big ideas over the next 10-15 years:

1) the workforce will continue to grow. More people in the market for jobs. These include elderly, women with children, persons with disabilities.

2) the pace of technological change will accelerate. More advances in technology will demand a highly skilled workforce.
3) Economic globalization will continue to increase, causing job losses in some areas, but job gains in other areas.

4) Rapid technological change and global competition will place the spotlight on the skills and preparation of the workforce. Growing importance of knowledge-based work and strong non-routine cognitive skills such as abstract reasoning, problem-solving, communication and collaboration.
How Times Have Changed

- We have entered a new era of technology, and the *pace of change* is very brisk.

- YET, our students’ reading and writing skills and performance have not kept up with the brisk pace of change that technology has brought about.
National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)—the national standard for comparing American students’ reading achievement in grades 4, 8 and 12.
How Times Have Changed

- At the 4th grade level, scores have actually increased substantially since 1970.
- Our students today read better than they did in 1970.

- At the 8th grade level, scores have increased slightly.

- At the 12th grade, students’ reading achievement has not improved since 1970.
- Scores have remained relatively flat over the last 40 years.
In 2006, ACT released a report on high school students scoring benchmark on the ACT and students not scoring benchmark.

They asked the question:

What differentiated these students? Why did some score well enough so that they would likely pass a Psychology 101 or History 101 class while other students did not?
How Times Have Changed

■ What differentiated students:
  ■ NOT students’ ability to draw inferences, determine main ideas, determine the meanings of words and phrases in context.
  ■ INSTEAD:
    ■ Students’ ability to do these tasks with complex texts.
    ■ Importance of text complexity in reading achievement.
How Times Have Changed

- Research* suggests that K-12 texts written during the last 30-40 years have been consistently declining in complexity—as measured by sentence length and vocabulary levels.

- Also significant gap between the difficulty of texts that high school seniors need to read and those that they need to read in their first year of college.

- “Too many students reading at too low a level*”

(*Common Core Standards, 2010)
“What students can read is at least as important as what they can do with what they read.” (Common Core State Standards, 2010)

Looking at text demands (text complexity) and task demands.

How complex is the text and what are we asking students to do with that text?
How Times Have Changed

- Important new idea:
  - Looking at higher level or critical thinking skills with increasingly complex texts.

- What may be unfamiliar to you:
  - Idea of complex texts.

- What is familiar to you:
  - The kinds of critical thinking tasks and skills that we are all familiar with.
How times have changed is reflected in the new *Common Core State Standards* (2010).

The Common Core State Standards arose as an extension of the College and Career Readiness (CCR) Standards in reading, writing, listening, speaking, language and math.

These were developed by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA).
The Common Core State Standards

- The CCSSO consists of all the State Superintendents of Schools in the country.
- The NGA consists of all the Governors in the country.
- Both are non-profit and non-partisan entities.
Benefits of the Common Core Standards

- All (most) states have agreed to use the Common Core.
- A common set of outcomes for all states.
- Good alignment with the NAEP (The Nation’s Report Card).
- Common assessments for all states.
- Can lead to better instructional texts.
- Outcomes line-up of K-12.
Two ways of measuring text complexity:

1) quantitative measures (numerical)

- These are like traditional readability formulas
- Look at vocabulary (high vs. low frequency words and/or the number of syllables in a word).
- Also look at sentence length; the longer the sentence (the more number of words in a sentence) the harder the text—the idea being that longer sentences are found in harder and more complex texts.
The Texts

- Traditional readability formulas
  - Dale/Chall readability
  - Fry readability

- Newer ones
  - Lexile Framework for Reading

- Newest one
  - Coh-Metrix, too complicated for use right now
The Lexile text complexity grade bands and associated ranges have changed.

Old Lexile ranges have been increased so that what used to be a fourth-grade text, for example, is no longer within the fourth-grade range but within the third-grade range, and what used to be an eighth-grade text is now considered in the seventh-grade range.
2) Qualitative measures (non-numerical)

- Levels of Meaning or Purpose
  - Single meaning in text $\rightarrow$ multiple meanings

- Structure
  - Simple $\rightarrow$ complex
  - *True Grit* vs. *Inception*
The Texts

- Language Conventionality and Clarity
  - Conversational → academic or domain-specific
    - *Charlotte’s Web* vs. *Emily Dickinson* poem

- Knowledge Demands: Life Experiences
  - Simple theme → complex themes
  - Single perspective → multiple perspectives
    - History event—e.g. causes of the Civil War
The Texts

Knowledge Demands: Cultural/Literary Knowledge for Literacy Texts
- Every day experience required → useful knowledge required
  - *My Pet Gus* vs. *From Seed to Plant*

Knowledge Demands: Content/Discipline Knowledge for Informational Texts
- Everyday knowledge required → extensive knowledge required
  - *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad*
## The Texts

- Additional changes
- **Newest NAEP**—Literary and Informational

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Literary</th>
<th>Informational</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### The Texts

- **Additional changes**
- **Newest NAEP—Informational Text**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>To Persuade</th>
<th>To Explain</th>
<th>To Convey Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Tasks (Standards)

- Grades 2-3 Standards—Informational Texts
  - Key Ideas and Details
    - Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.
  - Craft and Structure
    - Identify the main purpose of a text, including what the author wants to answer, explain or describe.
The Tasks (Standards)

Grades 2-3 Standards—Informational Text

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Describe how reasons support specific points the author makes in a text.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

By the end of the year, read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science and technical texts, in the grade 2-3 range text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.
Grade 2-3 (Read-aloud) *Charlotte’s Web*

“Where’s Papa going with that ax?” said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast.

“Out to the hoghouse,” replied Mrs. Arable. “Some pigs were born last night.

“I don’t see why he needs an ax,” continued Fern, who was only eight.

“Well,” said her mother. “one of the pigs is a runt. It’s very small and weak and it will never amount to anything. So your father has decided to do away with it.”
Task:

When discussing E. B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*, students distinguish their own point of view regarding Wilbur the pig from that of Fern Arable as well as from that of the narrator.
Grade 9-10 Standards—Informational Texts

Key Ideas and Details
- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

Craft and Structure
- Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view.
The Tasks (Standards)

- **Grade 9-10 Standards—Informational Texts**
  - *Integration of Knowledge and Ideas*
  - Analyze different accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g. a person’s life story in both print and multimedia) determining which details are emphasized in each account.
  - *Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity*
Example of Texts and Task

- TEXTS students read:

- TASK: Students compare the similarities and differences in point of view in works by Dee Brown and Evan Connell regarding the Battle of the Little Bighorn, analyzing how the authors treat the same event and which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.
Writing Standards

- Anchor Standards-four categories
  1) *Text Types and Purposes*
    - Write arguments to support claims, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
    - Writer informative/explanatory texts
    - Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences
2) Production and Distribution of Writing

- Produce clear and coherent writing
- Develop and strengthen writing by planning, revising, editing, rewriting
- Use technology to produce and publish writing
3) Research to Build and Present Knowledge

   Conduct short and sustained research projects
   Gather relevant information from multiple sources
   Draw evidence from literary or informational texts
4) **Range of Writing**

- Write routinely over extended time frames and shorter time frames for a range of tasks, purposes and audiences.
Examples of Tasks

Grade 2 Students:

Text types and purposes
Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points and provide a concluding statement or section.

Production and distribution
With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including collaboration with peers.
Examples of Tasks

- Grade 9-10 Students:
  - *Research to Build and Present Knowledge*
    - Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative sources, using advanced searches effectively, assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question, integrate information in the text selectively...
  - Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research.
The demands of literacy in the 21st Century are higher than they ever have been.

Standards and tests that measure these standards will be changing.

It is important to understand the new standards and why they have come about.

It is important to understand how instruction will need to change to support the standards.
MANY THANKS!!

jan.dole@utah.edu