

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS AS IT APPLIES TO THE COMMON CORE  
STATE STANDARDS' EMPHASIS ON COMPLEX, INFORMATIONAL TEXT

by

Janet L. Henley

An Abstract

of a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science in Library Science and Information Services  
in the Department of Educational Leadership and Human Development  
University of Central Missouri

July, 2014

## ABSTRACT

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This study, a literature review, will explain the Common Core State Standards' (CCSS) increased emphasis on the need to incorporate complex, informational text into curriculum. It will explain how students are not prepared for the demands of college and the workplace as applied to the comprehension levels of this type of text. This review will explain what complex informational text is how and why it is analyzed. It will explain why there is a need to comprehend complex, informational text as it pertains to college and workplace reading readiness. This research will then go into detail regarding the school librarian's role in supporting educators, collaborating with classroom teachers to incorporate complex, informational text into a curriculum based on the CCSS.

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July, 2014

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **Statement of the Problem**

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the United States has increased its focus on quality of education. Even with this focused effort students are only slightly more prepared for college and the workforce. One area of particular concern is the comprehension of complex, informational text.

The most significant indicator of college success is the ability to comprehend complex, informational text. A gap exists between the level of complex text that students are exposed to in high school and what they are expected to comprehend in college textbooks or in the work force with reading texts such as technical manuals. These texts are complex and informational in nature. Also, American students are falling behind other nations when competing for jobs in the international marketplace.

In an effort to bridge this gap between reading levels from high school through college and the workforce, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were developed. With the development of the CCSS librarians collaborate with educators to assist in raising reading comprehension levels in high school graduates to support a smoother transition to college and the workforce. Increasing reading comprehension leads to lower costs to students for remediation, higher graduation rates in college, and higher wages for workers.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to review the librarian's role in supporting educators with their need to increase student comprehension of complex, informational text. The study is a review of the literature related to an explanation of complex, informational text and the benefit librarians can offer teachers by collaborating on lesson plans that include these types of texts.

The study also takes a look at the consequences that have risen from low comprehension. It explores the benefits associated with higher comprehension of complex, informational text. Higher comprehension of complex, informational text leads to higher ACT test scores, less need for remedial classes in college, better retention rates in college, high work force readiness, and ultimately higher wages.

### **Research Questions**

With the gap in reading level expectations between high school and college or the workforce, and the shift to increased complexity of informational text in college textbooks or workforce reading, the Common Core State Standards require educators to increase the reading level expectations of their students. Because this type of reading is heavily represented in career and course work beyond high school, a close look at ways school librarians can assist educators is presented. The three questions below guided this study when it came to supporting educators with the shift to include more complex, informational text:

1. What is complex, informational text?
2. Why should educators be concerned about how well students read complex, informational text?
3. What is the librarian's role in helping teachers educate students on better text comprehension?

### **Limitations of the Study**

One of the main limitations of the study was the lack of in depth articles that focus on the impact of low reading comprehension of high school graduates as they transition directly to the workforce after high school. There was abundant information on the impact low complex, informational text comprehension has on college preparedness, but it was difficult to find articles

related to work place issues related to the topic. The scope of the materials used in this study were from business newspapers, peer reviewed articles, and educational websites. The findings are based on available resources.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Authentic learning:** The solving of real world problems through high end learning where relevant skills and knowledge are used to research, investigate, and solve real world problems.

**Cohort:** A group of college students working together at the same pace through the same academic curriculum.

**College readiness benchmark:** Scores that indicate a student is considered ready and on track to manage the demands of college or the workplace.

**Disenfranchised groups:** A group of persons without a home or political voice.

**Informational text:** Subgenres of argument, exposition, and functional text in the form of speeches, personal essays, essays about literature or art, opinion pieces, memoirs, biographies, journalism, and scientific, economic, or technical accounts written for a broad audience.

**Narrative text:** Text that tells a story about what happened and who did what to whom.

**Remediation:** Reading instruction with the focus of increasing comprehension and speed by correcting reading habits that are less productive.

### **Research Design**

The purpose of this research was to complete a literature review about the topic. Articles were obtained from databases provided by the James C. Kirkpatrick Library at the University of Central Missouri. The databases used include *Library Information Science and Technology Abstracts*, *Professional Development Collection*, *Education Research Complete*, *Library*

*Literature and Informational Science Full Text*, and *Educational Leadership*. Search terms included librarian's role, Common Core, informational text, complex text, authentic learning, college readiness, career readiness, global competition, improving comprehension, and primary sources.

Websites used include American Association of School Librarians, American College Testing, Alliance for Excellent Education, Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and Strong American Schools. A copy of the CCSS and its appendices were also used.

### **Conclusion**

This research contains three chapters related to the role of the librarian in incorporating complex, informational text into curriculum, aiming at improving the comprehension of these types of texts. Chapter one is an introduction. Chapter two is a literature review. Chapter three focuses on answering questions introduced in the first chapter. School librarians understand the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and collaborate with classroom teachers to incorporate complex text into a curriculum based on the CCSS.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The American College Testing (ACT) organization points out that since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 the United States (U.S.) has increased its focus on the quality of education. In spite of this effort, student readiness indicators show that high school graduates are, at the most, only slightly better prepared for post-secondary education than they were in the 1980s (“*Crisis at the Core*” 3). The Alliance for Excellence in Education explains that in 2012, the U.S. was seventeenth of the thirty-four countries belonging to the Organization for Co-operation and Development (OECD) for reading literacy, placing the U.S. at average when compared to other OECD countries. Also, of fifteen-year-olds in the U.S., seventeen percent do not reach the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) reading proficiency baseline. This percentile has remained unchanged since 2000. While this is close to average, the top five countries have only 10 percent or fewer students who fall under the baseline (Alliance for Excellent Education, *How Does the United States Stack Up?* 15). In 2014, students are basically no more ready for college when they graduate than students were in 2004 (ACT, *Crisis at the Core* 5). When students from other developed countries perform better than students from the U.S. on standardized tests, this causes concern due to increased globalization in the job market.

In order to address these concerns, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have been implemented in most states. School librarians understand these standards and collaborate with classroom teachers to incorporate complex text into a curriculum based on the CCSS. Librarians know about complex, informational text and know how to support educators in their quest to increase student comprehension of these texts. The first section of this paper describes the CCSS. These standards demonstrate the need to increase the level of comprehension of complex, informational text for U.S. high school graduates. The second section offers an

explanation of what complex, informational text is and where it can be found. The third section presents issues such as the gap that has formed between what is expected in high school and what is expected in college or the workforce. ACT research is referenced indicating the percentages of students who are not ready for college and those who need remediation. The costs and implications of not being prepared for college expectations are presented. The section also discusses how expectations associated with this type of text comprehension have increased for those graduates transitioning directly from high school to the workforce. In the last section, a discussion of the librarian's role as educational collaborator is presented. In an attempt to meet the demands of the CCSS, librarians can generate excitement by creating authentic learning experiences for students, which increase their comprehension skills. Librarians highlight the unique aspects of information resources, which increases students' comprehension of complex information text.

### **Brief History of the CCSS and the AASL Stance**

The Alliance for Excellent Education, in *Common Core Standards 101*, indicated that, in information from assessments in the 1990s and 2000s, students from the U.S. were testing lower than students their same age from other countries. Globalization in the market place had caused this to be a concern among policy makers inside and outside the United States' education system (2). Based on its research from 2006, the ACT organization found that the ability to comprehend complex texts is the greatest indicator of college preparedness (ACT, *Reading Between the Lines* 16). This led to the inclusion of objectives related to the comprehension of complex texts in the CCSS.

The CCSS are a set of educational standards that were developed by state governors and chiefs in education from 48 states. These standards, which are designed with the aim of career

and college readiness apply to kindergarten through seniors in high school to ensure that high school graduates are ready to tackle entry level courses in college and have the academic skills necessary to enter and more effectively compete with a global workforce. Having a common set of standards across the U.S. provides students, parents, and educators with expectations to ensure that students have the knowledge and skills necessary for post-secondary education. These academic standards are also aligned with the expectations that workforce training programs and college entry-level classes require. Unlike previous standards, CCSS are the same from state to state (Common Core State Standards, *Frequently Asked Questions* 1). These standards are fewer in number when compared to other sets of school standards, but they aim for higher, more rigorous learning with evidence-based feedback. Focusing on key topics, the CCSS aim to balance skills and concepts, process, and content.

Knowing why the CCSS were established and what they intend to improve is the first step to their effective implementation in K12 schools. These standards direct educators by providing (1) benchmarks and goals to prepare students for post-secondary education and careers, (2) consistent expectations for students who move from state to state, (3) collaboration opportunities across the country as teachers are all working from the same set of standards, and (4) colleges, universities, and professional development programs with an opportunity to better prepare educators (Common Core State Standards, *Frequently Asked Questions* 1).

David V. Loertscher and Elizabeth Marcoux emphasize that the CCSS were written with the purpose of overarching and unifying student learning expectations all over the United States (8). CCSS need to be addressed and understood as states adopt them, and librarians are often the educators that best understand these standards. The opportunities for librarians to make a

difference relate most directly to the standards for reading and comprehension of complex, informational text (8-14).

Paige Jaeger highlights six notable changes in English language arts standards in the CCSS. First, she notes that even though literacy starts in the lower grades, it needs a bigger, nonfiction focus. Second, she emphasizes that literacy is important from kindergarten through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, not just in the lower grades. Third, text complexity matters. Fourth, text-dependent inquiry, which requires students to give special attention to text, is important for better complex text comprehension. A fifth change is that with CCSS, the skill of writing complex information and evidence-based arguments is central. Lastly, students should be reading literature that contains a rich vocabulary (“Complex Text, Reading, and Rigor” 30).

Rebecca Morris states that combing through the standards and taking steps to implement changes is best accomplished when librarians collaborate with classroom teachers. The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) has prepared a crosswalk to show educators the link between their *Standards for the 21st-Century Learner* and the CCSS. This document is extensive, spanning 128 pages, and can be found at <http://www.ala.org/aasl/standards-guidelines/crosswalk>. That this resource is so lengthy demonstrates the librarian’s crucial role in collaborating with educators in their schools’ embracement of the CCSS (AASL “Position Statement”). With the implementation of the CCSS in most states, librarians are called to know as much about complex, informational text as possible and to know how to support educators in their quest to increase student comprehension of this text. This will provide all students with the opportunity to better learn the information skills they will need for their future careers and college.



### **An Explanation of Complex, Informational Text**

Complex text can be fiction or non-fiction. However, for a text to be complex it needs to represent what common core supporters refer to as the "RSVP" definition. The RSVP definition, as it relates to complex texts, has six elements: (1) relationships (among character and ideas) are shown to be subtle, deeply rooted, and complex; (2) rich text containing largely sophisticated messages, (3) structure of the reading that is found to be detailed and, at times, unique; (4) style, language use, and tone that are often complex and sometimes unclear; (5) vocabulary that is found to be contextually dependent and demanding; and (6) purpose that is implied but is sometimes unclear (Hill 43).

A majority of texts that English language arts teachers currently teach are fictional; however, literacy needs a bigger non-fiction focus (Jaeger, "Complex Text, Reading, Writing, and Rigor" 30). Most of the reading that graduates will encounter, whether it is in college or the workforce, will be informational. Nell Duke, a leading research professor, teacher of education and educational psychology, and co-director of the Literacy Achievement Research Center at Michigan State University explains that informational text requires a different approach and pace from the reader. Texts that are fictional are usually read from the first page to the last page. Informational texts are usually read by section, on an as-needed or as-desired basis. The index to an information book is utilized to direct the reader to a specific section. The pace at which information text is read is different in that it varies from section to section depending on the level of experience or interest of the reader (Duke, "The Case for Informational Text" 42).

The largest portion of reading adults encounter is nonfictional and informational in nature. Informational text conveys information accurately to increase the reader's knowledge of a specific subject, to help the reader's understanding of a process or procedure, or to enhance the

reader's comprehension of a concept. Informational text addresses components (different parts of a copy machine for example) and types (different types of flowers); function, size, and behavior (How big is Alaska, What is radiation used for? How do glaciers form?); how things work (How does the Electoral College work?); or why things happen (Common Core State Standards, "Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts 23").

Informational text comes in many types of sources, both print and electronic. It can be found in nonfiction books, reference books, magazines, journals, newspapers, and on-line on websites. Informational text has one purpose: to convey information. When examining informational text the following features might be present: an index, headings, a table of contents, pictures, realistic drawings, captions, graphs, charts, timeless verbs, generic nouns, bold facing, italicization, specialized vocabulary, and specific text structure (Duke, "The Case for Informational Text" 40).

Marc Aronson and Susan Bartle explain that the CCSS have placed a greater emphasis on reading from kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Instead of placing so much emphasis on fiction, the guidelines now focus more attention on informational text and narrative text. Narrative texts are nonfiction books that have a clear beginning, middle, and end but still remain true to the author's sources. Instead of asking students to react in a subjective manner to chapter books, short stories, or novels, the CCSS require students to evaluate the information they discover in nonfiction texts (29). This type of reading comprehension is better related to what is expected in college and in the workplace.

Paige Jaeger outlines ways to analyze text. She recommends that when analyzing text educators keep in mind the quality of the text and the reader's purpose for referring to the text ("Close Encounters" 10). Disciplinary and grade level teams collaborate to analyze the quality

of informational text and write text-dependent questions to ensure students will increase comprehension skills (Kinsalle 18). Review of the quality of texts includes analyzing its readability; the complexity of the writing style, grammar, and vocabulary; whether it has real-world relevance; and if it contains curriculum content. One measure of the complexity of a text is assessed by its readability measure, such as the Lexile level. Educators, when assessing quality, will look for long complex sentences that model quality grammar to stretch student ability. Complex, informational texts make the reader think, analyze, and ponder. This is best accomplished if the text is actually interesting to the reader (Jaeger, "Close Encounters" 10-11).

Integrating vocabulary instruction to allow better reading comprehension is imperative. By effectively and selectively teaching the meaning behind complex vocabulary in high-level texts, educators in all subjects can productively and manageably raise reading comprehension (Kinsalle 19). Choosing readings that include vocabulary related to curriculum content will further support student comprehension (Jaeger, "Close Encounters" 11).

When considering the reader's task, educators will consider what the reader is asked to do with the information he or she is getting from the text. Articles should contain a curriculum message and allow the reader to "react" to the message. Students may have different tasks associated with the reading, such as responding to text dependent questions, retelling, asking questions, comparing and contrasting, creating visuals, identifying meaning, locating information, or interpreting visuals (Tyson). Choosing texts with a curriculum message, that has real-world relevance, will allow educators the opportunity to teach a specific lesson while also exposing students to complex text (Jaeger, "Close Encounters" 11). For example, if a teacher is teaching a lesson on our nation's independence, the Declaration of Independence could be accessed through the Library of Congress website to support that lesson's curriculum.

### **The Need to Comprehend Complex, informational Texts**

The ability to read complex, informational text competently and independently is necessary for success in college as well as on the job and is critical in many life tasks. Trends currently indicate that if students cannot read complex texts with good comprehension, they will simply read less overall. Students who cannot read sophisticated informational text to gain needed information will likely rely on text-light or text-free sources of information like videos, tweets, or podcasts (Jaeger, "Close Encounters" 10), which are often inadequate for the reading task.

The CCSS for English language arts (ELA) require students to have the ability to read and comprehend sophisticated information so they understand the documents and books they will read during college classes as well as in the workplace (Alliance for Excellent Education, *Common Core Standards 101* 4). Textbooks in colleges have become more sophisticated; and training manuals, as well as other on the job related reading, require skills that exceed normal 12<sup>th</sup>-grade reading levels. Students in college are required to read from academic journals, and the difficulty of vocabulary in professional journals and magazines has been increasing rapidly (Hill 43). While the complexity of text for college and career readiness has at least held steady or even risen in the past 50 years, the sophistication of the reading materials that students are exposed to in secondary school has declined. Not only are high school students not exposed to enough complex text, they are simply skimming to find answers and not really "reading" the text. To shrink the gap that has formed between what students are exposed to in high school and what they will need for success after high school, the CCSS require increasing the complexity of the materials that students read as a crucial part in improving reading comprehension (Jaeger, "Close Encounters" 10).

## College Readiness

A mere 51 percent of high school graduates who took the ACT in 2005 had the level of readiness in reading that is expected in college. Students were more on track to be ready for college level reading in the 8th grade and in the 10th grade than they were when they were seniors in high school. Tests have indicated in the past that a greater percentage of 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> graders are “on track” for becoming college ready than actually are ready by the time they are seniors in high school. Too few schools are teaching reading strategies or skills in high school, and students too often fall victim to the low expectations of teachers. Also, the ACT organization notes that if a student is perceived to not be college bound, teachers are less likely to teach critical reading skills (*Reading Between the Lines* 1-11).

Not enough high school students are prepared for college level expectations; this is also indicated by results shown in the ACT’s national readiness indicators. Only 26 percent of ACT-tested secondary school graduates met the ACT organization’s College Readiness Benchmark showing their readiness for the initial credit-bearing classes in biology, based on the results of the 2003-2004 ACT Assessment. Only 40 percent of high school students are prepared for their initial classes in college level algebra; and, while higher, only 68 percent were prepared for college classes in English composition (ACT, *Crisis at the Core* 1). Mark Bauerlein spells the situation out clearly:

Back in September 2008, some 3 million people in the United States became college freshmen – the largest cohort ever. But the weeks before school started brought a setback. The students took a placement test, and many found that they probably wouldn’t be able to handle the work to come. If they were to enroll in a regular calculus or freshman composition

course, chances are they would fail. They had graduated from high school, but they didn't have the knowledge and skills to tackle reading, tests, and papers at the next level. So the college assigned these freshmen to a remedial unit in math, reading, or writing – a precollege course for no credit that aimed to send them into spring semester ready to earn grades of C or higher. (1)

Now that one recognizes that there is a gap between the level of complex texts that students are exposed to in high school and the level of complex text that students need to be able to comprehend in college and the workforce, collectively as an educational movement, educators are taking steps to make that gap smaller. These steps were set up in the CCSS to raise the comprehension levels of students that are going into college. Higher reading comprehension reduces the need for remedial classes that are costly and do not count towards a degree (Alliance for Excellent Education, *Common Core State Standards 101* 1).

When students meet the benchmark for reading set by the ACT, they are more likely to go to college and are more likely to succeed than those who fail to meet the benchmark. Those who meet the benchmark are also more likely to enroll in college right after high school graduation. Seventy-four percent of those who meet the benchmark enroll right away versus only 59 percent of those who do not meet the benchmark. Those who met the benchmark receive higher grades in college. Fifty-four percent who met the benchmark got a 3.0 or higher, while only 33 percent who did not meet the benchmark got a 3.0 or higher. Also, those who meet the benchmark are more likely to return to college the second year (ACT, *Reading Between the Lines* 11). "Only 30 percent of 1992 high school seniors who went on to enroll in postsecondary education between 1992 and 2000, and then took any remedial reading course, went on to

receive a degree or certificate, compared to 69 percent of the 1992 seniors who took no postsecondary remedial courses and 57 percent of those who took one remedial course in a subject other than reading or mathematics" (Common Core State Standards, "Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts" 3).

Strong American Schools reports that the cost for remediation in public colleges is over \$2 billion dollars, estimated conservatively. The entire cost of college level remediation per student is estimated to be between \$1,607 and \$2,008 for a two-year public school. For a four-year college the estimated cost of remediation is between \$2,025 and \$2,531 based on the year 2004-5 (3).

Furthermore, few students in college remedial classes felt that their high school classes were particularly challenging. Fifty-nine percent of students in remedial college classes said that their high school classes were easy. Close to half wish that their classes in high school had been harder so that they would have been better prepared for college (Strong American Schools, 4).

### **Workplace Readiness**

For the last thirty years, the modern workplace has encountered many changes. Fewer jobs are considered "unskilled" and the ability to read complex text, such as text from training manuals, is crucial (ACT, *Crisis at the Core iv*). Society is becoming increasingly complex. The global workplace requires students to possess a full range of knowledge and intellectual skills. Educators in the U.S. are not doing enough to get students prepared for modern careers or higher education (Strong American Schools 5). Career manuals such as military manuals, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning guides, Chilton's auto repair manuals, and other work-related texts have a Lexile that is higher than the 12<sup>th</sup> grade level (Jaeger, "Close Encounters" 10). The

requirements for those transitioning from the classroom to the work place have risen and continue to rise (Alliance for Excellent Education, *How Does the United States Stack Up?*).

Melissa Levy reported in a *Wall Street Journal* interview with past Secretary of Education Richard Riley that adults with lower literacy rates are less likely to sustain full time employment, earn larger wages, and are less likely to vote. These Americans are living in poverty and just getting by. Educators who work towards raising reading comprehension will better prepare their students for the global economy. This global economy is experiencing rapid changes in technology, and the workplace is undergoing a transition to require more literate workers.

### **Demographic Differences in Reading Skills**

The CCSS expect all students, no matter what state they are from, to develop skills and knowledge needed for success after high school (Alliance for Excellent Education, *Common Core State Standards 101* 11). With the greater focus on informational text comprehension, the U.S. still fails to cultivate strong informational writing and reading skills in many of its students. This is especially true for children from traditionally disenfranchised groups, an area of concern given the influence of informational text in higher education, work, and U.S. citizenship. Considering America's change in demographics, a special consideration for preparing minorities and women in larger numbers for highly skilled technological and scientific careers is recommended in a growing global economy (ACT, *Crisis at the Core* iii-2).

The number of high school seniors ready for college level expectations in reading is unfortunately markedly smaller in some groups. Asian American students, white students, and students from households that have an annual income of \$30,000 or more have a greater likelihood to be ready for college level reading than the whole ACT tested population. Male



students, Hispanic American students, African American students, and students from households that have an annual income of \$30,000 or less are not as likely to be ready for college when compared to the whole ACT tested population. In some cases, they are up to two-and-a-half times less prepared (ACT, *Reading Between the Lines 2*).

When broken down by ethnicity and race, college readiness statistics are concerning. Hispanic Americans and Native Americans are approximately half as likely to be ready for readings in college biology courses than the total population tested, "and African Americans are about five times less likely" (ACT, *Crisis at the Core 1*). The percentages from these ethnic groups meeting college readiness benchmarks only represented slightly higher readiness for college algebra. While Asian Americans and Caucasians met the college readiness benchmark for English in higher numbers when compared to the whole population, Hispanic Americans, Native Americans, and African Americans did not fare so well. In fact, African Americans were nearly one-and-a-half times less likely to have met the benchmark for college English when compared to the total population (ACT, *Crisis at the Core 1*).

Nell Duke tells educators that the information age is here and the relevance of having the ability to read, comprehend, and write informational texts effectively and critically cannot be overestimated. Comprehension of informational text is key to achievement in post-secondary education, the workplace, and in the community. A primary focus of achievement in post-secondary education in the U.S. is to develop students who can successfully read, write, and analyze informational material and who cannot only locate but also accurately communicate information discerned by reading text. Researchers have suggested that facilitating an increase in experience with informational materials in the lower grades could lessen the difficulty many children have with informational text later in their schooling (Duke, *3.6 Minutes Per Day 202*).

### **The Librarian's Role**

Librarians have the experience necessary to support educators who want to increase the level of reading instruction in their curriculum. Having the resources on hand, increasing exposure and promoting resources is what librarians have been doing for years. The focus is shifting to support instruction with complex, informational text by increasing comprehension skills and focusing on the unique aspects of informational resources while generating an excitement for inquiry. Increasing the amount of time students spend with complex, informational text for authentic purposes will better prepare them for post-secondary expectations in reading comprehension.

Authentic learning and authentic purpose are terms used frequently to describe a better quality of learning. Renzulli and Reis describe authentic learning as the high end learning that applies relevant skills and knowledge to investigate, research, and solve real world problems. Authentic learning involves identifying and focusing on relevant information with a problem and then critically analyzing, categorizing, and effectively synthesizing that information and reporting the results (74). Audrey Rule emphasizes four themes authentic learning will include: (1) activities centered around real-world problems, (2) the use of thinking skills with open-ended inquiry, (3) a community of learners engaging in social learning, and (4) project work where students are directors of their own learning (1). Librarians can collaborate with classroom teachers to design authentic lessons that involve inquiry as well as modern presentation tools for group projects.

To prepare students for the demands of post-secondary plans, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) encourages school librarians to not only provide resources, but also to be literacy team members who have a role in supporting both digital and print reading

comprehension while their libraries pose as terminals of reading instruction (Hill 45). Members of the AASL are encouraged to study and understand the standards to better ensure they can support student achievement in mastering the CCSS:

The school library professional as leader, instructional partner, information specialist, teacher, and program administrator is critical for teaching and learning in today's schools. The school librarian leads in building 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills by collaborating with classroom teachers to design engaging learning tasks that integrate key critical thinking skills, technology and information literacy skills with subject area content. In addition, the school librarian provides a library program that contains multiple instructional avenues and resources in various formats for the authentic application of information literacy skills. (American Association of School Librarians, "Position Statement")

The school librarian, as an experienced leader, teaching partner, resource specialist, educator, and program facilitator is vital for learning in modern schools. The librarian has the opportunity to design interesting lessons that combine critical thinking, information literacy, and technology with content area information. Also, the librarian facilitates a program that incorporates numerous instructional tools and information resources in a variety of formats for real world application of skills in information literacy (AASL, "Position Statement"). Librarians do this by making sure that informational reading is being used for authentic learning. Increasing the availability of informational resources in text in digital and print form is part of supporting an increased emphasis on informational reading (Duke, "Improving Comprehension"). Increasing student exposure to resources in text involves promoting these resources, increasing instruction on comprehension skills, and focusing on the unique aspects of informational text, as well as

increasing the amount of time that students have to work with informational text. All of these strategies support students who are gaining the ability to better understand complex, informational text.

### **Providing Access to Complex Texts**

Reading is emphasized by the CCSS, and librarians have a long history of making resources available. Librarians work behind the scenes to make sure teachers and students are matching their reading with the standards from the Common Core (Jaeger, "Close Encounters" 30). Teachers and librarians strengthen instruction in reading schoolwide by incorporating more complex reading into the content of all high school courses not just English language arts. Strong informational texts have complex relationships, rich data or literary devices, structure, style, vocabulary, and purpose. Educators can encourage students to read informational texts that are challenging, and help their efforts by providing them with strategies to increase critical reading. Schools can collectively, systematically, and purposefully assess students' readiness for college level reading and put interventions in place when difficulties are encountered (ACT, *Reading Between the Lines* 23 and 27).

Incorporating complex text requires educators to push student reading to higher levels. The Lexile range of informational text for grade 11 through career and college-ready was 1070-1220, but now with the implementation of the Common Core, the Lexile range is 1215-1355 (Common Core State Standards, "Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts" 8). Educators need to locate appropriate, high level, informative articles to use for instruction. This applies to both digital and print resources specifically mentioned in the CCSS primary documents (Jaeger, "Complex Text, Reading, and Rigor" 32).

Exposing students to resources is an aspect of librarian duties that is not new; however, it now shifts focus to sources of informational text. Preparing book carts, bulletin boards, book talks, digital promotional aides, and displays are not a thing of the past. Librarians are just taking on more nonfiction. Making print resources more accessible usually involves showcasing those resources in student-focused, attractive displays. "In the land of the Common Core, we see your library, with its print and digital resources, as the true information superhighway, and [the librarian] as the real-life 3-D search engine" (Aronson and Bartle 29). Aronson and Bartle point out that creating clustered displays is one of the ways to show resources to everyone who walks into the library.

The Library of Congress is one place to find primary source reading materials that meet the CCSS for complex, informational text for class work (Jaeger, "Complex Text, Reading, and Rigor" 32). Annette Lamb explains that "primary source documents are raw materials that reflect the time and place in which they were written. They provide a rare glimpse into the past and ignite student inquiry. Because Common Core State Standards (CCSS) require students to read complex texts, many educators are rediscovering the value of primary source digital documents in teaching and learning" (5). At the Library of Congress website one can find texts such as letters written to Alexander Graham Bell from Helen Keller. Teacher-librarians can take these primary documents and get them scored at Lexile.com. Because the Library of Congress has built such an extensive digital collection, the possibilities for work with primary documents are extensive (Jaeger, "Complex Text, Reading, and Rigor" 32). Avishag Reisman and Sam Wineburg point out that history teachers are "blessed" with the opportunity to use primary sources because the Library of Congress has digitized historical documents (24). One way school librarians make online resources, such as those at the Library of Congress, more accessible to

teachers and students is by connecting them with the appropriate CCSS and then linking them from the library webpage.

With the increased emphasis of information text in the common core it is interesting to note how little informational text is represented in the classrooms at lower grade levels. Nell Duke indicates in her research that providing informational resources is especially critical in the lower grades where such text is not as highly represented. In her study of 20 first-grade classrooms in 10 districts in the Boston metropolitan area only 9.8% of the books found in classroom libraries were of the informational type. In the higher socioeconomic classrooms 12.7% of the books were informational, and in the lower socioeconomic classrooms only 6.9% were informational (*3.6 Minutes Per Day* 213-214).

### **Collaborating on Reading Instruction**

Elfrieda Hiebert and Dana Grisham write about schools with literacy coaches for teachers and how they can assist educators with their approach to incorporating complex text into their lessons. They use a five module approach to coaching teachers: (1) explain what is meant by text complexity, (2) describe the advantages and disadvantages of text complexity, (3) point out features that influence text complexity for beginning and struggling readers, (4) explain differences in narrative and informational texts, and (5) provide alternative methods for establishing text complexity (7-10). School librarians can take on the role of instructional coach, assisting teachers with these strategies.

Instructional support through collaboration has been a focus of the modern librarian. Mary Ann Wolf, Rachel Joes, and Daniel Gilbert explain that effective school librarians have been instructional partners by matching educators with resources such as print and electronic text as well as the technology necessary to create engaging lessons. Normally, teachers come to the

librarian with a plan and want help finding resources, but the reverse can also be effective.

Librarians can go to teachers with resources and collaborate with the teacher to develop a lesson around informational text whether it is print or electronic (9).

Catherine Gewertz emphasizes that already plenty of informational texts are available to educators. Schools will now focus on how to teach with informational resources. She explains that teachers will need assistance in developing curriculum maps and adequate lesson plans to meet the demands of the CCSS (14). School librarians play a major role in co-developing lessons when they show educators that technology is not just a presentation tool but can assist in learning in other ways. Using tools, such as the collaborative writing available with Google Docs, facilitates a new level of group work, builds strong editing skills, develops group ideas, and facilitates effective argument production, which are emphasized in the CCSS (Loertscher and Marcoux 14). Librarians support educators with the use of these tools by including them in lessons involving complex text. Students are now expected to be able to read and comprehend complex, informational texts proficiently and independently, both inside and outside of their English classrooms. This learning outcome can be accomplished through active collaboration of teachers and librarians through teaching, designing, and assessing the reading of complex, informational texts. If librarians advocate for and communicate their collaboration services to educators in planning curriculum, assessment, and professional development, implementing more rigorous lessons with the CCSS can be better achieved (Morris 10).

### **Strategies for Teaching Students to Comprehend Instructional Texts**

Numerous resources on teaching CCSS reading strategies are available. Educating students to connect with a strategy that works for them is one of the goals of Susan Dymock and Tom Nicholson's article. They explain that a reading strategy is a technique or plan to help

students get the information they need from text. Teaching different strategies, such as activating background knowledge, questioning, analyzing text structure, creating mental images, and summarizing, can all lead to better comprehension of informational text (166-172). Elfrieda Hiebert stresses that students need these strategies for better comprehension when reading tasks become too difficult. Students know most of the words they read, but they need strategic help once they encounter unfamiliar text (“For the CCSS Assessments” 19).

To demonstrate excitement for the reading portion of research, teachers and librarians can make the process more interesting to students. Educators can use strategies to set up authentic reasons for reading with informational text. They create situations where students will need information, then show students how to find and comprehend that needed information. For example, they encourage students to locate information on the life cycles of fish before assembling a fish tank, or they discover the necessary conditions for growing herbs before planting an herb garden. Educators spike curiosity in younger students by laying out earthworms for observation, or by demonstrating evaporation by measuring the amount of water that evaporated from a pie pan that was set out on Friday and comparing that to the amount of water left on Monday. Lessons such as these allow students the opportunity to read informational texts about evaporation or earthworms with a higher level of interest (Duke, "The Case for Informational Text" 43). Similar strategies can be used to engage students with texts in other subjects.

Carie Windham explains that authentic learning engages students because it allows students to act as a professional. They get to step into the role of researcher, archaeologist, historian, scientist, or teacher. Students are involved in open-ended inquiry where there is no



right or wrong answer. Students have the opportunity to feel and see the world around them in a real world environment (8).

### **Conclusion**

With the technology expertise that librarians can offer combined with resources that are rich with complex text, librarians are equipped to support educators with their quest to increase student comprehension of these texts. Susan Ballard stresses that librarianship has always been about making resources available, but now more than ever it is about making complex, informational text available to support curricula based on the CCSS. Librarians will be asked to help with teaching comprehension skills and to support teacher instruction in new ways. An emphasis on generating excitement for the reading portion of research and focusing on the unique characteristics of informational text is a new challenge for librarians. While incorporating technology, librarians will be looking for ways to increase the time spent with informational text, while finding ways to have students interact with increasingly complex, informational text for authentic purposes. "NASA has a booster rocket referred to as the Common Core. A booster rocket-I like it! That's what teacher-librarians can and must be in achievement of the Common Core Standards to ensure lift off to real 21st century learning and to learning for life" (Ballard 71).

The CCSS were drafted to give the states a common focus to better prepare students for post-secondary plans and from there to global competition in an ever expanding workforce. These standards were written with a specific emphasis on increasing comprehension of complex, informational text. The library media specialist is poised to be a critical instructional partner with classroom teachers by collaborating with educators to increase students' comprehension of complex, informational text. When the CCSS are understood and a collaborative effort is made

in schools, students will be better prepared to comprehend the type and level of reading they are going to be exposed to in post-secondary institutions and in the global job market. Taking a systematic approach will hopefully turn our nation from a nation at risk to a nation ready for the demands of an academically competitive and global economy.

### CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research has shown the ability to comprehend complex, informational text is essential for college and work place readiness. Because of this indicator and the need to increase comprehension of complex, informational text, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have emphasized the need to increase student exposure and instruction with complex, informational text. With the implementation of the CCSS in most states, librarians are called to know as much about complex, informational text as possible and to know how to support educators in their quest to increase student comprehension of this text. Answers to the following questions related to complex, informational text will better prepare librarians for this increased focus: what is complex, informational text? Why should educators be concerned about how well students read complex, informational text? What is the librarian's role in helping teachers educate students on better text comprehension?

#### **Complex, Informational Text**

To meet the requirements of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) students need to read text that is increasingly complex as they progress through school (Hiebert, "The Common Core State Standards" 13). Complex text is found in books, but it is also found in digital reading, journal articles, and other media that presents challenging messages. Complex text contains sophisticated messages with complex relationships, style, language use, and tone. The vocabulary with complex text is contextually dependent and demanding, and the purpose of the text is not always clear but implied (Hill 43).

When educators choose text for use in lessons it should make students think, analyze, and ponder. Three things should be kept in mind when evaluating text: the quality of the text, the complexity of the text, and the reader's task. Text should also require students to recall

information from previous exposure and require maintained concentration (Jaeger, "Complex Text Reading and Rigor" 10-11).

The largest portion of text adults encounter is nonfiction and informational in nature. Informational text conveys information accurately to increase the reader's knowledge of a specific subject, to help the reader's understanding of a process or procedure, or to enhance the reader's comprehension of a concept. Informational text addresses components and types; function, size, and behavior; how things work; or why things happen (Common Core State Standards, "Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts 23"). Informational text is found in nonfiction books, reference books, magazines, journals, newspapers, and on-line on websites (Duke, "The Case for Informational Text" 40).

Informational text has one purpose: to convey information. When examining informational text the following features might be present: an index, headings, a table of contents, pictures, realistic drawings, captions, graphs, charts, timeless verbs, generic nouns, bold facing, italicization, specialized vocabulary and specific text structure (Duke, "The Case for Informational Text" 40).

### **Implications for Comprehending Complex Text**

According to the CCSS, students need to be able to comprehend complex text so they are prepared for college and the work force. Just above half of high school graduates who took the ACT in 2005 were at or above a reading level, which indicated they would be prepared for college reading expectations (ACT, *Reading Between the Lines* 11). Given these results, nearly half of all students need to take remedial courses before they can handle the demands of the regular college classroom. These courses cost money and do not count toward a degree. Students who enroll in remedial courses are more likely to drop out of college. Only 19% of

students who took three or four remedial college courses in 1992 actually earned a bachelor's degree by 2000 (Strong American Schools, 4).

The workplace encountered many changes in recent decades. Fewer jobs are considered “unskilled,” and with more “skilled” technical jobs, the demand for workers with the ability to comprehend complex text has increased (ACT, *Crisis at the Core*, iv). The requirements for those transitioning from the classroom to the workplace have risen and continue to rise (Alliance for Excellent Education, *How Does the United States Stack Up?*).

### **Librarian's Role**

The American Association of School Librarians (AASL) encourages its members to study and understand the CCSS to better support student achievement. The librarian is an information specialist, instructional partner, program administrator, and teacher. Librarians are collaborating with educators to build 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills that incorporate critical thinking, technology, and information literacy (AASL, “Position Statement”).

Librarians are teaching partners with educators in making sure informational text is used for authentic learning. Increasing the availability of informational resources in both print and digital form is part of supporting the new emphasis on informational reading (Duke, “*Improving Comprehension*”). The librarian has the unique position to facilitate a program of incorporating numerous instructional tools and informational resources in a variety of formats. Librarians are experienced leaders, teaching partners, resource specialists, educators, and program facilitators. The librarian has the opportunity to work with teachers to design lessons that incorporate critical thinking, information literacy, and technology with content area information (AASL, “Position Statement”). Increasing student exposure to resources in text, including the promotion of these resources, increasing instruction on comprehension skills, and focusing on the unique aspects of

informational text are ways to improve instruction. Increasing the amount of time that students have to work with complex, informational text develops their ability to better read and understand it.

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