THE POWERFUL LITERACY POSSE
AND THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:
A COLLECTION OF SCHOLARLY PAPERS

By

Katherine J. Grindon
B.A., Vanderbilt University, 2003
M.A.T., University of Louisville, 2005

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A Dissertation Approved on

July 31st, 2014

By the following Dissertation Committee:

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DEDICATION

For my parents, Al and Joan: my first and best teachers

ABSTRACT

THE POWERFUL LITERACY POSSE

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Katherine J. Grindon

July 31, 2014

This dissertation is a collection of scholarly papers on the implementation of the English/Language Arts Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the integration of the standards with critical literacy. The dissertation is divided into five sections, including three papers intended for publication. The first section is the introduction to the dissertation. It explains the context of critical literacy and the CCSS and outlines the study to be conducted. The introduction also explains the three paper format of the collection. The second section explores the integration of critical literacy and the CCSS in one classroom. Through The Advocacy Project, students find empowerment while meeting the expectations of the CCSS. The third section is a review of current literature on the implementation of the CCSS. After noting trends in the literature, this section makes recommendations for future scholarship based on the significant limitations of current research. The fourth section of the collection discusses original research conducted in light of the gaps in current literature. In a focus group study of five middle-grades teachers, participants concluded that critical literacy and successful implementation of the CCSS are not mutually exclusive. Rather, a culture of high-stakes accountability testing poses a threat to a framework of critical literacy.

Recommendations for schools, districts, and professional development are made. The final

section of this collection is a summary statement reflecting on this work and its potential

publication.

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INTRODUCTION:

The Need for Scholarly Work on CCSS

Since the publication of the Common Core State Standards by the Council of Chief State School Officers in 2010, there has been controversy over their adoption. Some educators and organizations, such as the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), are leery of potential government intrusion into classrooms. Writing on behalf of the NCTE leadership, NCTE President Keith Gilyard wrote in 2012, "We stand opposed to any initiative or standards that would reduce educational opportunity or equity in our schools through top-down, one-size-fits-all implementation programs." More recently, states previously committed to teaching the Core Standards and utilizing common assessments have pulled out of testing consortia such as PARCC (Partnership of Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Florida is one such state, leaving PARCC after Governor Rick Scott faced political pressure to distance the state from the Common Core initiative (McGrory, 2013a).

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, spoke in support of the standards, saying, "We believe these standards have the ability to transform the DNA of teaching and learning to ensure that ALL children, regardless of where they live, have the critical thinking, problem-solving and teamwork skills and experience they need to succeed in their careers, at college and in life" (Ravitch, 2013). As noted by Michael Petrilli,

executive vice-president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, the debate over the Common Core "has devolved into an argument between different political factions rather than an argument about education" (McGrory, 2013b).

With all of the publicized debate, however, there has been little scholarly work accomplished on the implementation of the standards. A review of the EBSCO Academic Database conducted in November, 2103 revealed 229 articles published in refereed journals with the keywords "Common Core State Standards." When the words "study" or "research" are added, this number drops to 143 and 52, respectively. Research on implementation at the middle or secondary level is particularly lacking. A search of "Common Core State Standards" + "research" + "secondary" revealed 9 articles. Four of these articles included original research. Clearly, there is a need for scholarly work in this field, particularly for work involving original research.

Proposed Papers

Rather than complete a traditional five-chapter dissertation, I proposed a non-traditional structure. This structure would include a prospectus, or introduction, three academic papers, and a summary statement. The purpose of this non-traditional dissertation format was to better contribute to the field and provide insight into the process of implementing the English/Language Arts Common Core State Standards (referred to hereafter as the CCSS). These three papers are ready for submission to a refereed journal, but publication is not intended to be a prerequisite for completion of the doctoral dissertation. These three papers are a narrative autoethnography, a forward-looking literary synthesis, and a phenomenological case study.

Narrative Autoethnography

The first paper is a narrative autoethnography. This paper follows my attempts to implement the CCSS in my own classroom within a framework of critical literacy. According to Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2010), autoethnography is a way of "producing meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience" (History of Autoethnography section). The personal experience described in the paper is the two years spent studying the standards in a teacher cohort and implementing the standards in a 7th grade Language Arts classroom. As a teacher and researcher I was in a unique position to share my work with the larger literacy community; my state was the first to adopt, implement, and assess the CCSS. My experience from initial adoption through accountability assessment allowed me to "retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by… possessing a particular cultural identity" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010, Doing Autoethnography: The Process section).

For this academic work, the phenomenon studied was the attempt of the teacher to integrate critical literacy, student engagement, and the CCSS. This work was well suited to the personal narrative form of autoethnography (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010). The intended audience for this paper is administrators, policy-makers, staff developers, and teachers who are faced with implementing the CCSS in their own classrooms. Potential refereed journals for publication of this manuscript include *Language Arts*, *Voices from the Middle,* and *The Reading Teacher.*

Forward-Looking Literary Synthesis

The second paper is a forward-looking synthesis of current literature relevant to the fields of critical pedagogy, student engagement and self-efficacy, and the CCSS. The

intended audience for this paper is researchers and instructional policy-makers. A potential refereed journal for publication is *Review of Educational Research*. This journal "publishes critical, integrative reviews of research literature bearing on education, including conceptualizations, interpretations, and syntheses of literature and scholarly work in a field broadly relevant to education and educational research" (American Educational Research Association, 2013). This paper is a synthesis of the current scholarly work on the standards, which has relevance to the current educational climate.

Phenomenological Case Study

The third paper shares the results of original research. This research was a phenomenological case study grounded in critical pedagogy. Phenomenology investigates the "meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience" of a particular phenomenon for an individual or a group of people (Patton, 2002, p. 104). For this study, the phenomenon was the experience of a group of teachers working together in an attempt to reconcile critical literacy and the CCSS. The intended audience for this paper is teachers, staff developers, school, district, and state administrators, teacher educators, and researchers. Potential refereed journals for publication of this paper are *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, Reading Research Quarterly,* and *Educational Researcher.* A proposal of this study follows.

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Theoretical Framework and Review of the Literature

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In creating a theoretical framework for this study, it is helpful to visualize how three fields interact: critical literacy pedagogy, student engagement and self-efficacy, and the CCSS. My study exists at the intersection of these fields:
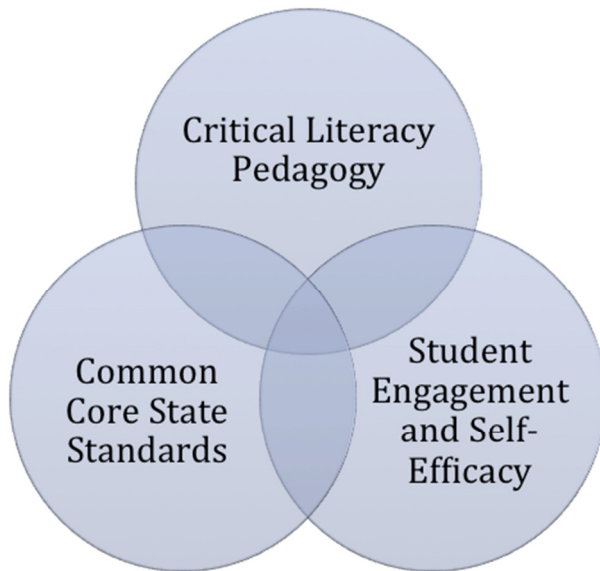
Understanding "Critical Literacy"

In this era of 21st-century skills and new standards, the term "literacy" can be defined myriad ways. Alvermann (2002), as well as Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, and Mueller (2001) explained, "literacy is more than basic reading skills; it encompasses a range of forms of communication that are all embedded in social interactions" (as cited in Wright & Mahiri, 2013, p. 124). In Patrick Finn's *Literacy with an Attitude: Educating Working-Class Children in Their Own Self-Interest* (2009), he divided literacy into two genres: powerful literacy, "the kind of literacy that leads to positions of power and authority," and functional literacy, "literacy that makes a person productive and dependable, but not troublesome" (p.xv-xvi).

Influenced by scholars such as Anyon (1980), Freire (1970), Kozol (1992), and Willis (1977), Finn challenged teachers to give students "powerful literacy" (2009, ix), literacy that engages and enables all students, including those from the poor and working classes. Within systems of oppression, powerful literacy allows citizens to contribute to society and work for social, economic, and political change (Freire, 1970, UNESCO, 2006). Vasquez (2010)

described this literacy as "a way of being," and outlined ten basic tenets of this classroom framework. These tenets include: (a) having a critical perspective in the classroom, (b) using students' "cultural knowledge and multimedia practices," (c) reading the world as a "socially constructed text," (d) understanding that texts are "never neutral," (e) identifying the ways in which texts "position us," (f) identifying the ways our own perspectives position us as we read, (g) understanding that the concept of truth is "mediated through discourse," (h) acknowledging the "sociopolitical systems" that affect power in text, (i) recognizing our own power to affect change through text, and (j) recognizing that the creation of text can lead to transformation (p. 2-4).

Stevens and Bean (2007) defined this powerful, critical literacy as "active questioning of the stance found within, behind, and among texts. Critical literacy is an emancipatory endeavor, supporting students to ask regular questions about representation, benefit, marginalization, and interests… a broad epistemic framework…a critique of dominance, a commitment to emancipation, and the use of critique and reflection as a means to empowerment" (p. 123-124). This definition calls on students and teachers to recognize dominant structures and systems, and to ask the important questions of "why" and "how." Why are some views and some voices heard, but not others? How do authors perpetuate stereotypes? How does the establishment become established in the first place? These questions call on students to question their own labels, as well. What makes a student "at-risk"? What makes someone a minority? How do students support or fight against the dominant culture in their own choices of what to read and what to write? All teachers make choices about how classroom time is spent and what knowledge is privileged. Within critical classrooms, these choices work to empower students. Teachers work with students to

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deconstruct the world and words around them while constructing words and worlds of their own (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Shor, 1999).

This "new literacy," as Finn (2009, p. 35) called it, is heir to the tradition of progressive education, as it is literacy in which the control and the learning shifts from the teacher to the student. It includes conversations about power and justice, and calls on students to become agents for change (Harste, 2000; Leland, Harste, Ociepka, Lewison, & Vasquez, 1999). While Finn termed it "new," there is nothing new about these ideas. Educators since Dewey (1916) have sought to engage children in education that creates critical thinkers and citizens who will challenge inequity. However, these theoretical ideals are unrealized in many of our classrooms.

Perhaps this lack of implementation is due to the inability to turn critical literacy into a program or scripted curriculum. Critical literacy is often described as "theory with implications for practice rather than a distinctive instructional methodology" (Behrmann, 2006, p. 490). Teachers are under increasing pressure to conform to standards and curricula, and to follow set texts (Apple, 1986). Creating a "critical literacy" classroom is more complex than reading a certain text or following a specific "critical" scope and sequence map. However, there are identifiable characteristics of classrooms working within a critical framework. In these classrooms, teachers "carefully design literacy experiences that both encourage critical examination of texts and foster personal and emotional connections" while students "engage in critical conversations about texts where they question who and what is depicted and how that reflects societal norms and values" (Wood & Jocius, 2013, p. 664-665). Ideally, such classrooms would feature collaboration between teachers and students in order to foster students' understanding of "how texts work, what texts intend to do to the

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world, and how social relations can be critiqued and reconstructed" (Behrmann, 2006, p. 491).

There are also instructional strategies that support a framework of critical literacy, such as "reading supplementary texts, reading multiple texts, reading from a resistant perspective, producing counter-texts, conducting student-choice research projects, and taking social action" (Behrmann, 2006, p. 492). More specifically, these strategies involve "identifying multiple voices in texts, dominant cultural discourses, multiple possible readings of texts, and sources of authority where texts are used" (Behrmann, 2006, p. 491).

It is important to note, however, that there are significant barriers for creating a classroom with a critical mindset. Power struggles between students and the traditional teacher-dominant structure can fight against the student-led discourse and inquiry needed. Pressure from administrators, district policy, and mandated curricula or standards can hinder a teacher's ability to empower students with critical literacy (Beck, 2005). In light of widespread adoption of the CCSS, it is reasonable for teachers to question if there is room in the standards for critical literacy.

Critical Literacy and the CCSS

Many who are skeptical of the new standards see them as a threat to critical literacy. In 2000, Luke asked, "Is critical literacy in a state-based educational system an oxymoron?" (p. 449). As the CCSS rolled out across the nation, Gangi and Reilly (2013) returned to this essential question. They argued the CCSS does not support critical literacy, by "privileging efferent reading and marginalizing aesthetic reading" (Gangi and Reilly, 2013, p. 10). However, it is not clear that the CCSS and critical literacy are mutually exclusive. The new CCSS demand students do more complex analysis than they've ever done before, but the

CCSS does not offer direction on instruction itself. Some may see the standards as confining, but one could choose to view them as granting permission to be flexible and creative. Rather than read from a textbook or specific set of classroom novels, the standards can serve as justification for offering students a voice in selecting texts they care about. While preliminary documents by the authors of the CCSS signaled teachers should not discuss student background knowledge when analyzing text, the authors revised and clarified their position in the *Revised Publisher's Criteria for the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy, Grades 3-12* to state that teachers should not front-load instruction to the extent that thorough analysis of the text is unnecessary (Shanahan, 2013).

The *Revised Publisher's Criteria* noted that although there must be a shift in the "focus of literacy instruction to center on careful examination of the text itself" rather on extensive scaffolding, pre-reading, or front-loading student knowledge, this shift does not mean teachers cannot choose texts and tasks that connect with students' schema, or that teachers cannot grant students choice in selecting texts to analyze (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012, p. 1). It also does not mean teachers cannot teach students to acknowledge the lens through which they view text and the world. When students understand their own lens, and understand the ways in which this lens colors everything they read, they draw on their backgrounds to bring meaning to text.

College and Career Readiness Standard 1 states that students must be able to: "Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text" (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 35). Teachers are not tied to specific texts in order to meet this standard; the primary qualification for text is that it is sufficiently

complex. Specifically, the Publisher's Criteria called for reading materials to "acknowledge the range of students' interests" and that "high-quality newspaper and magazine articles as well as information-rich websites" can be used to meet standards of text complexity (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012, p.4). As Freire and Macedo (1987) as well as Vasquez (2010) noted, with critical literacy students read the world in addition to reading the word. When students read closely (Standard 1), analyze a text (Standard 1), analyze an author's word choice (Standard 4), and determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text (Standard 6), they acknowledge that these words, choices, and positions are not neutral. When critical literacy is a "way of being" (Vasquez, 2010) in a classroom, these standards allow students to read the world. The standards do not demand a teaching framework of critical literacy, nor do they not prohibit one. Rather, they are an opportunity for teachers to explore how literacy can engage and empower students.

As teachers transform critical literacy theory into practice, they must keep in mind the best practices of reading instruction. These best practices should not be in opposition to nor substantiate critical literacy theory practice, but be consistent with them.

Student Engagement and Self-Efficacy

Educators have long known that best practice in reading instruction includes the intertwined elements of motivation, confidence, choice, reading amount, and comprehension. Of all the variables present in a classroom, student engagement is the single biggest predictor of achievement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). As noted by Newkirk (2009) in *Holding on to Good Ideas in a Time of Bad Ones*, student engagement is the key to meeting the expectations of the CCSS and incorporating critical literacy:

We are missing the big story in literacy development…[students] soon perceive

school literacy as alienating work. Students develop "basic" skills but millions don't

progress from there…. it's high time to rewrite this sad narrative, to believe that

literacy can be made attractive to all students, that it holds the possibility of

engagement…any effort to teach analytic or reflective literacy skills, it seems to me,

is built on the premise of engagement, for an analysis is our unpacking or our

reactions and involvement. (p. 129)

It is less clear in the literature how the elements of choice, confidence, reading

amount, cognitive strategies, and motivation combine to create student engagement. One

possibility is that choice, or self-selected reading, increases pleasure; students will continue

to do things that are pleasurable, therefore increasing student exposure to complex syntax,

themes, and vocabulary. Another possibility is that self-selected reading boosts the student's

reading confidence or self-efficacy, and that as self-efficacy increases, success on

comprehension tests also increases. It is also possible that self-efficacy begets choice; when

a student feels good about his or her abilities, the student will choose more and more texts.

Perhaps reading amount trumps motivation; if a student is forced to read a high volume of

text, comprehension will increase regardless of the choice or motivation driving the volume.

Finally, comprehension skills and strategies could be the essential beginning. It is possible

that students will only have high self-efficacy and motivation, and will only choose texts and

read high volumes, once they have been taught specific skills and strategies that will aid

comprehension.

Effective literacy instruction exists within a sociocognitive framework. This is the

underlying belief that the learning of an individual is strongly influenced by the learning,

dialogue, and community occurring around him. This framework is strongly influenced by

the work of Vygotsky (1987) and Bahktin (1981). Vygotsky places student and teacher learning "within an environment in which both can participate in thoughtful examination and discourse about language and content" (Langer, 2001, p. 1041). This discourse is essential to the social aspect of education and learning.   Bahktin regards literacy as a "multilayered history of experiences with language and content, cutting across many contexts" rather than a collection of strategies and skills (Langer, 2001, p. 1041). To Bahktin (1981), dialogue is essential to the learning, not an addition to it or a distraction from it. These values of community and dialogue are central to best practices in literacy instruction.

The element of self-efficacy is rooted in the work of Bandura (1977). Put simply, self-efficacy is "people's judgments of their capabilities" (Bandura, 1986, p. 391). Educators are more familiar with the idea of self-esteem, but there is a difference between self-esteem and self-efficacy. While self-esteem often depends on the student's perception of others' opinion of him, self-efficacy is "the personal belief that students have about their ability to succeed at a particular task" (McCabe & Margolis, 2001, p. 45; Bandura, 1977).

The scope of academic self-efficacy can be narrowed to focus solely on reading self-efficacy. High self-efficacy beliefs affect performance (Pajares, 1996), so increasing self-efficacy is of importance to educators. One frequently used instrument to measure reading self-efficacy in children and adolescents is the Reader Self-Perception Scale (RSPS) (Henk, Marinak, & Melnick, 2012; Henk & Melnick, 1995). This instrument measures reading self-efficacy in four areas: progress, observational comparison, social feedback, and physiological states. Johnson, Freedman, & Thomas (2007) suggest that there are four elements to reader self-efficacy: confidence, reading independence, metacognitive awareness, and reading stamina. By examining the four areas delineated in the RSPS and the four elements

described by Johnson, et al. (2007), educators can pinpoint the underlying issues of a student with low reading self-efficacy.

Not only has self-efficacy been tied to performance, it has been linked to motivation (Zimerman, 2000; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990). Motivation was explored by Deci and Ryan (1985). Their self-determination theory defined two different types of motivation: that which originates internally, called intrinsic, and that which originates from an outside source, called extrinsic. Taboada, Tonks, & Wigfield (2008) found that high motivation to read contributes significantly to high reading comprehension. In 1999, Guthrie, et al. found that motivation significantly predicted both reading amount and comprehension. These studies found that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation were predictors. Therefore, increased reading self-efficacy leads to increased motivation, it leads to increased reading amount, and it leads to increased reading comprehension.

For many students, reading self-efficacy and reading motivation are determined long before the student reaches adolescence. In what Stanovich (1986) terms the "Matthew Effect", strong readers get positive feedback on their reading, their motivation increases, and their self-efficacy climbs. They become stronger readers. Struggling readers, on the other hand, get negative feedback, they dread reading, and their self-efficacy plummets. They become weaker readers.

Educational researchers have looked at various ways of increasing self-efficacy in struggling adolescent readers (Margolis & McCabe, 2004; Margolis & McCabe, 2006; Walker, 2003). Many of these educators offer choice via self-selected reading as a key component of increased self-efficacy. Walker found student choice helps students "develop a sense of confidence and, in turn, self-efficacy" (2003, p. 177). Furthermore, allowing choice

in literacy increases motivation and engagement. If comprehension, or performance, is affected by self-efficacy and motivation (Guthrie, et al. 1999; Pajares, 1996), and increased student choice leads to increased self-efficacy and motivation (Walker, 2003), then student choice and comprehension are clearly, if indirectly, linked.

Statement of the Problem

Critical literacy theory and student engagement in the context of the CCSS present "a difficult challenge demanding innovative and local solutions" (Behrmann, 2006, p.491). I posited that an effective teacher can incorporate critical literacy into a standards-based curriculum to increase engagement, self-efficacy, and comprehension.

In my own work in the classroom, I spent three years creating units and lessons that met the rigorous expectations of the CCSS while incorporating the essential elements of critical literacy and research-supported best practice. As I worked with teachers in my building, district, and university, however, I suspected teachers were implementing a CCSS-based curriculum at the expense of critical literacy, student engagement, and student reading self-efficacy. Therefore, the problems investigated in this work centered on three questions: 1) Can the CCSS be implemented into a classroom within a framework of critical literacy? 2) What literature exists regarding the implementation of the CCSS and critical literacy? 3) Can the work of one teacher be replicated with other teachers?

Research Questions

Can the work I have done in my classroom be replicated, or is it unique? How do leaders, schools, and districts create spaces in which teachers can struggle with this learning? How does a teacher enact a philosophy of critical pedagogy in the time of the CCSS? What impact does this instruction have on student reading self-efficacy? These questions deserved

analysis, and created the need for this study.

I proposed a study in which I followed teachers for three months as they struggled with the incorporation of these elements into a CCSS-based curriculum. There were two research questions for this study: 1) How do teachers enact a philosophy of critical pedagogy in the time of the CCSS? 2) What impact does this instruction have on student reading self-efficacy? There were three goals of this study: 1) To identify the obstacles and supports teachers encounter as they attempt this work, 2) To identify patterns and themes in teachers' experiences, and 3) To determine if this work has a significant impact on student reading self-efficacy, as measured by student scores on the RSPS2 instrument.

It is the hope of this investigator that as a result of publication of this study, teachers, administrators, district staff, and, most importantly, students will benefit from the experiences of the study's participants.

Methodology

Research Design

In qualitative research, investigators ask broad questions in an attempt to understand the "inside perspective" (Patton, 2002, p. 8). Qualitative methods allow for depth and insight into situation or problem. Quantitative research asks narrow questions with measurable responses. Large numbers of participants are used, and data is analyzed statistically. When one methodology will provide only part of the picture, perhaps the "why" but not the "how much" aspects of data, it useful to mix qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell, 2008). In order to answer the two research questions of this study, both qualitative and quantitative methods were utilized. Situated within the pragmatist paradigm (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009), mixed methods research finds value in both qualitative and quantitative

methodologies, allowing the research questions to drive the design. In mixed methods design, qualitative and quantitative measures of data are collected and analyzed. As the first research question in this study required depth and insight into participants' thought processes and beliefs, it was suited to qualitative methodologies. The second question in this study investigated student reading self-efficacy as a measured score, and was an ideal fit for quantitative methodologies. To examine both questions, the investigator relied on mixed methods research design in order to "provide a single, well-integrated picture of the situation" (Patton, 2002, p. 557).

When designing mixed methods research, it is important to determine how quantitative and qualitative methods will be triangulated. Of the two types, simultaneous and sequential, simultaneous triangulation will be used for this study. As explained by Morse (1991), simultaneous triangulation is the concurrent use of qualitative and quantitative methods, "in which there is limited interaction between the two sources of data during the data collection stage, but the findings complement one another at the data interpretation stage" (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007, p. 115).

Specifically, this study used a concurrent nested design (Creswell, 2003) in which there is a primary research question and a secondary research question studied concurrently. The primary research question was informed by the qualitative methods of the study. The qualitative design was a phenomenological case study of a group of teachers over a three-month span.

As explained by van Manen, "phenomenology is the study of lived or existential meanings…it attempts to explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our lifeworld" (1990, p. 11). Rather than create treatment groups or experimental situations,

phenomenological studies examine humans in their own realities (van Manen, 1990). Such a

study describes participants' experience and asks participants to explicitly share their

thoughts on that experience (Patton, 2002). For this study, which sought to observe teachers

as they wrestled with critical literacy and the CCSS, understanding the real world of these

teachers' lives and their classrooms was essential, and made the phenomenological approach

the best fit for this study.

There is also the assumption within phenomenological methodology that the

phenomenon in question is a shared experience (Patton, 2002). In seeking common themes

among different participants, the essence of the phenomenon can be more completely

understood. For this reason, a case study of teachers is an ideal fit for this phenomenological

research. Patton recognizes the "centrality of case studies as a qualitative inquiry strategy"

(2002, p. 297). A case study is a specific, complex look at a particular phenomenon within

the broader perspective of real-world experience (Lin, 2014; Stake, 1995). As explained by

Baxter and Jack (2008), case study should be used when the research aims to investigate

questions of "'how' and 'why'" and when you cannot or do not want to "manipulate the

behavior of those involved in the study" (p. 450). A case study approach is also useful when

"you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant" (Baxter &

Jack, 2008, p. 450).

It is important in any case study to define what makes a "case." This study focused

on "stages in the life of a person or program" (Patton, 2002, p. 447). All study participants

shared the common "stage" of struggling to integrate critical pedagogy into a curriculum

grounded in the CCSS. Because multiple perspectives were essential to understanding the

complexity of this phenomenon, participants were expected to engage in reflective thinking

and discussion. The nature of this discussion required teachers to share beliefs about potentially sensitive topics. In order for such sharing to occur, participants needed to feel emotionally safe and comfortable with the other members of the study. For this reason, the intended participant sample size was small, *n*= 4-6. Within the qualitative case study, data consisted of group interviews and individual interviews.

In this study, the essential research question asked 'how': How does a teacher enact a philosophy of critical pedagogy in the time of the CCSS? It was important participants feel they could behave freely, without manipulation or reprisal. There was no single "right" outcome of this study. Also important in this study was the context of the classroom. Every participant had a different building, student, and administrative context within which she was working. Understanding these contexts is necessary for understanding the choices the participants made.

In this study, teacher participants engaged in grounded theory in educational practice. As participants studied the CCSS and the Finn text, they attempted to make sense of the data before them and create theory about the implementation and implications about the CCSS (Charmaz, 2006). Just as there was no "right" outcome of this study, there is no single "right" way to bring critical literacy or the CCSS to students. Ideally, participants in this study will in turn become participant-observers in their own schools, working with other teachers as they encounter their own lived experience with critical literacy and the CCSS. That work, however, is beyond the scope of this study.

The nested, quantitative, method was used to inform the secondary research question of the study: What impact does this instruction have on student reading self-efficacy? This was a within-subjects design, a design with "repeated observations on the same subject"

(Shavelson, 1996, p. 459). Data was collected in the form of a student survey to be given as a pre- and post-study measure of each student.

Participants

  Teachers. This study was conducted in a large, urban Southern public school district. For the teacher portion of this study, purposeful intensity sampling was used. According to Patton (2002), "an intensity sample consists of information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely)" (p.234). As the focus of this study was the struggle with the integration of critical pedagogy into the CCSS, an intimate knowledge of the standards was essential for all participants. Since the new standards-based curriculum is only 24 months old, many teachers are still struggling to understand and implement the curriculum and are not able to effectively add another layer to their instruction. To account for this, teachers with classroom and curriculum experience were asked to participate in this study. All participants had been part of the standards implementation team in the district or had been identified by district leaders in areas of content instruction and the new standards-based curriculum. Teachers received an outline of the participation requirements. All participants received a copy of Finn's 2009 text *Literacy with an Attitude: Educating Working-Class Children in their Own Self-Interest* for a group book study. The intended teacher sample size for this study was *n*=4-6. This size allowed participants to become comfortable with each other and engage in meaningful discussion.

  Students. This study did not involve random sampling of students, as teacher participants acknowledged that their students will be involved in the study as well. The target student population for this study was the students enrolled in participating teachers Reading/Language Arts classes in the 2013-2014 academic year. All enrolled students were

eligible to participate in the study with parent/guardian permission. Each teacher taught 100-120 students, so the student sample size for this study was *n*= 400-720. All students are in the 6th, 7th, or 8th grades.

Ethical Considerations

There was very little potential risk for teachers participating in this study. Possible risks included uncomfortable conversations during group discussions and the potential for one participant to upset another participant. These risks were outweighed by the benefit of reflection and shared ideas in the group discussions. Teacher participants benefited from discussions with other teachers about implementation of critical literacy and the CCSS. Collegial conversations provided an opportunity to form a critical-friends group in which to share frustrations and successes.

A broader benefit of this study was the potential scientific yield of strategies, techniques, or support systems that can be used at the school or district level to help teachers integrate critical literacy into a CCSS curriculum. The potential benefits of the study justified the potential risk.

There was very little potential risk for students participating in this study. The class time spent on the RSPS2 was justified by the increased engagement and self-efficacy students experienced with a teacher implementing elements of critical literacy into instruction. Teachers sent home a letter explaining the purpose of the study and the RSPS2 (provided by the researcher). Teachers administered the RSPS2 only to students whose guardians had given permission for participation and who had agreed to participate.

Participants could opt out at any time during the study, excluding themselves from further participation. All participant identities, both teacher and student, remained

confidential.

Instruments

   Qualitative. In qualitative research, the instrument is the researcher herself. In this case, data was collected through group interviews, and individual interviews. Group discussions were particularly relevant for this study; as participants struggled with new challenges, the hope was that the group would become a supportive environment. Discussions from interviews such as these can be "more specific, meaningful, and animated than what can be obtained from individually filled out…questionnaires and surveys (Patton, 2002, p. 388). Group discussions were semi-structured; the researcher obtained prior approval of guiding questions from the study's faculty methodologist. Individual interviews are an essential tool in qualitative research, as they "allow us to enter into the other person's perspective" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). While most of the data for this study was collected through group discussion, each participant was given the opportunity to express individual, private opinions during an interview at the end of the study. These interviews used the general interview guide approach. This approach offers the interviewer the opportunity to "build a conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversational style but with the focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined" (Patton, 2002, p. 343). A preliminary interview guide is attached (see Appendix A). The researcher obtained prior approval of final interview questions from the study's faculty methodologist. Patton notes the usefulness of an interview guide "to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed" (2002, p. 343).

   Quantitative. The quantitative data for this study was collected using the Reader Self-Perception Scale 2 (Henk, Marinak, & Melnick, 2012) (see Appendix A). The RSPS2 is

an updated version of Henk and Melnick's RSPS, first published in 1995. The RSPS2 is specifically designed to measure self-perceptions of reading self-efficacy in adolescent readers; the RSPS2 was validated in young adolescent and intermediate students. On this survey, students were asked to respond to 47 statements about reading using a 5-point Likert scale. Responses in the Likert scale are Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). A sample statement from the survey is "I think reading can be relaxing." The 47 statements include one general reading statement, "I think I am a good reader" and 46 statements from four scales: Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological States (Henk, Marinak, & Melnik, 2012). These scales represent the four factors students take into account when considering their own reading ability, according to Bandura. The RSPS2 takes 20-25 minutes to administer, and is easily scored by a teacher or researcher.

Validity and Reliability

Qualitative. The credibility of qualitative study is dependent on the use of rigorous methods, the credibility of the researcher, and the richness and thickness of the data (Patton, 2002). The use of "methods triangulation" through group interview, individual interview, and document analysis helped to "strengthen confidence in whatever conclusions are drawn" (Patton, 2002, p. 556). Patton defines methods triangulation as, "checking out the consistency of findings generated by different data collection methods" (2002, p. 555). Thorough documentation and explanation of the researcher's decision-making process allow other researchers to replicate the study. Extensive discussion of the researcher's own experience in the classroom with critical pedagogy, the researcher's familiarity with participants, and length of time with the participants added to the credibility of the

researcher. Simultaneously, however, the participant-observer role of the researcher was a threat to the validity of the study. In qualitative research, the reality is that "the researcher is a central figure who influences, if not actively constructs, the collection, selection, and interpretation of data… research is co-constituted, a joint production of the participants, researcher and their relationship" (Finlay, 2002, p. 212). The practice of memoing throughout the study increased the researcher's reflexivity; in memos the researcher attempted to address the inherent potential for bias by separating the researcher's thoughts and assumptions from the thoughts and experiences of the participants (Patton, 2002; Charmaz, 2006). Finally, providing concrete and detailed data increased the reliability of the study. As Patton (2002, p. 437) notes, "Thick, rich description provides the foundation for qualitative analysis and reporting."

Quantitative. Internal consistency reliability analysis, a measure of consistency between different items on the same test (Shavelson, 1996), shows that the RSPS2 is reliable, with scale alphas of: Progress= .95, Observational Comparison= .92, Social Feedback= .87, and Physiological States= .94. The content of the survey was validated by Henk, Marinak, and Melnik (2012) first by graduate students and then by 488 students in 7th and 8th grades in a pilot program. After revision, factor analysis showed that the content of each scale was reliable with coefficients above the .70 threshold. This indicates that participant responses to the questions are consistent throughout the survey.

Procedures

Qualitative.   Teachers agreeing to participate in the study received and signed an informed consent form. The form stated that the participants were guaranteed certain rights, and that by signing the form they agreed to participate in the study but could withdraw at any

time without penalty.

Teachers received the book *Literacy with an Attitude: Educating Working-Class Students in their Own Self-Interest* (Finn, 2009). Teachers were expected to read the book and participate in group discussions. These discussions occurred four times over two months.   The discussions were held in a neutral but private location. The discussions lasted for 90 minutes, and were moderated by the researcher. During the course of the study, the focus of the discussions moved from the philosophies and theories found in the text to the practical advantages and challenges of implementing critical pedagogy into the classroom. At the end of the study, each teacher participated in a 60-minute exit interview. All group discussion and interviews were video and audio recorded and transcribed for later analysis.

Quantitative. Classroom teachers administered the RSPS2 within one week of the beginning of the study. Teachers read each item out loud to students to control for differences in reading ability. Teachers gave the RSPS2 again within one week of the exit interviews. For both the pre-and post-study administration of the RSPS2, the teacher scored all surveys.

Data Analysis

Group interviews/discussions and individual interviews. All group discussions and individual interviews were transcribed for analysis. Coding of the data began while the study was in progress in order to take advantage of the "power of field-based analytical insights" (Patton, 2002, p. 436). A code, as described by Saldaña, is "a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (2009, p. 3). Each discussion and interview was coded. All data was content analyzed, starting with the "basic description" of field

notes, moving to "conceptual ordering" through coding, and ending with "theorizing" (Patton, 2002, p. 490).

First-round coding began with descriptive and In Vivo coding to look for patterns in the teacher discussion and student work (Saldaña, 2009). Descriptive coding "summarizes in a word or short phrase-most often as a noun-the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 70). In Vivo coding "refers to a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 74). The process of pattern coding groups existing codes into themes or explanations (Saladaña, 2009, p. 152). Pattern coding was used for second-round coding to determine what major themes emerged. The software Dedoose was utilized to aid in the creation and organization of codes.

RSPS2. Data from the pre- and post study administration of the RSPS2 were analyzed using a paired-samples dependent t-test to test for differences in students' pre and post study perceived reading self-efficacy. Data were also examined using ANCOVA tests to establish the effect of grade and teacher when the variance of each pre-test score was removed.

ARTICLE OVERVIEW:

Advocacy at the Core:

Inquiry and Empowerment in the time of Common Core State Standards

The first paper in this collection is a narrative auto-ethnography. This paper follows my attempts to implement the Common Core State Standards in my own classroom within a critical literacy framework. The paper describes the two years spent studying the standards in a teacher cohort and implementing the standards in a 7th grade Language Arts classroom. Audiences for this paper include district and school administrators, policy-makers, and teachers who are faced with implementing the Common Core Standards in their own classrooms. This paper was first published in Volume 91, No. 4 of *Language Arts.* Copyright 2014 by the National Council of Teachers of English. Reprinted with permission.

ADVOCACY AT THE CORE:

INQUIRY AND EMPOWERMENT IN THE TIME OF

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Teacher professionalism is at a threshold. Moral purpose and change agentry are implicit in what good teaching and effective change are about, but as yet they are society's (and teaching's) great untapped resources for radical and continuous improvement. –Michael G. Fullan, "Why Teachers Must Become Change Agents" (1993)

Twenty years after Fullan's charge to teachers, states across the nation are implementing the Common Core State Standards, and teachers find themselves at another threshold. Many states have eased into adoption over a span of years, with educators slowly dipping their toes into the waters of curriculum design, implementation, and assessment. As assessment deadlines draw nearer, however, many educators are nervous that with full implementation of the new standards, our profession's "resources for radical and continuous improvement" will continue to go untapped. I have spent the last three years working with the standards in my classroom, and have found that the standards and change agentry are not mutually exclusive. Students can master the standards within a framework of critical, empowering, and engaging lessons.

My Experience with State Implementation

In 2009, even before the final publication of the CCSS, my state legislature passed Senate Bill 1 (2009). Among other educational reforms, this bill called for the CCSS to be implemented at the classroom level in August 2011, and assessed in May of 2012. The scores would be used to determine state, district, and school's achievement of Adequate Yearly Progress. From a classroom teacher's perspective, this was a rapid turnaround.

To facilitate the implementation of Senate Bill 1, the Department of Education created K-16 networks comprised of teachers, administrators, and instructional leaders from across the state. In the summer of 2010, I was asked to participate in one of these networks as a teacher representing my district. We met one day each month for three years, including summers. One of our first tasks was to fully understand the new ELA standards (which the state adopted as the "Core Academic Standards") and deconstruct them. This work required thoughtful analysis of the reading, writing, language, and speaking and listening anchor standards. Once the group as a whole studied the anchor standards, we then broke out into age-level groups to determine what skills and knowledge were needed for mastery of each grade's standards.

We stopped short of delineating each individual learning target; teachers would need to use their knowledge of their students and pre-assessments to determine which specific learning targets would help their students reach mastery. Rather, the job of the network was to agree upon what phrases such as "develops and contrasts the points of view of different characters" would mean to teachers across the state. This process involved hours of study and discussion, as one teacher's definition of these terms differed vastly from that of another teacher. When it came to putting into teacher-friendly language and describing mastery at

the student level, subtle changes in words led to drastically different interpretations. We often worked in teams, with state facilitators moderating discussion when we encountered differences in interpretation.

One benefit of this process was that teachers involved in the networks studied the standards intensely for an entire year. We slowly began to implement the standards into our classrooms, taking note of what worked and what didn't. The network served as a sounding board for participating teachers and provided a safe space in which to discuss the successes and failures of early implementation. I can imagine that many teachers, not having participated in the networks, felt unprepared when the Department of Education rolled out the standards in late spring of 2011 for implementation the following school year. Although I participated in the network and spent over 50 hours developing a deep understanding of the standards, it was still daunting to consider implementing new standards and moving students to mastery.

Critical Literacy from Theory to the Classroom

In this era of 21st-century skills and new standards, the term "literacy" can be defined myriad ways. Alvermann, as well as Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, and Mueller explained, "literacy is more than basic reading skills; it encompasses a range of forms of communication that are all embedded in social interactions" (as cited in Wright & Mahiri, 2013, p. 124). In Patrick Finn's *Literacy with an Attitude: Educating Working-Class Children in Their Own Self-Interest* (2009), he divided literacy into two genres: powerful literacy, "the kind of literacy that leads to positions of power and authority," and functional literacy, "literacy that makes a person productive and dependable, but not troublesome" (p.xv-xvi).

Influenced by theorists such as Anyon (1980), Freire (1970), Kozol (1992), and

Willis (1977), Finn challenged teachers to give students "powerful literacy" (2009, ix), literacy that engages and enables all students, including those from the poor and working classes. Within systems of oppression, powerful literacy allows citizens to contribute to society and work for social, economic, and political change (Freire, 1970, UNESCO, 2006). Vasquez (2010) described this literacy as "a way of being," and outlined ten basic tenets of this classroom framework. These tenets include: (a) having a critical perspective in the classroom, (b) using students' "cultural knowledge and multimedia practices," (c) reading the world as a "socially constructed text," (d) understanding that texts are "never neutral," (e) identifying the ways in which text "position us," (f) identifying the ways our own perspectives position us as we read, (g) understanding that the concept of truth is "mediated through discourse," (h) acknowledging the "sociopolitical systems" that affect power in text, (i) recognizing our own power to affect change through text, and (j) recognizing that the creation of text can lead to transformation (p. 2-4).

Stevens and Bean define this powerful, critical literacy as "active questioning of the stance found within, behind, and among texts. Critical literacy is an emancipatory endeavor, supporting students to ask regular questions about representation, benefit, marginalization, and interests… a broad epistemic framework…a critique of dominance, a commitment to emancipation, and the use of critique and reflection as a means to empowerment" (2007, p. 123-124). This definition calls on students and teachers to recognize dominant structures and systems, and to ask the important questions of "why" and "how." Why are some views, some voices, heard but not others? How do authors perpetuate stereotypes? How does the establishment become established in the first place? These questions call on students to question their own labels, as well. What makes a student "at-risk"? What makes someone a

minority? How do students support or fight against the dominant culture in their own

choices of what to read and what to write? All teachers make choices about how classroom

time is spent and what knowledge is privileged. Within critical classrooms, these choices

work to empower students. Teachers work with students to deconstruct the world and words

around them while constructing words and worlds of their own (Freire & Macedo, 1987;

Shor, 1999).

       This "new literacy," as Finn calls it, is heir to the tradition of progressive education,

as it is literacy in which the control and the learning shifts from the teacher to the student

(Finn, 2009, p. 35). It includes conversations about power and justice, and calls on students

to become agents for change (Harste, 2000; Leland, Harste, Ociepka, Lewison, & Vasquez,

1999). While Finn terms it "new," there is nothing new about these ideas. Educators since

Dewey (1916) have sought to engage children in education that creates critical thinkers and

citizens who will challenge inequity. However, these theoretical ideals are unrealized in

many of our classrooms.

       Perhaps this lack of implementation is due to the inability to turn critical literacy into

a program or scripted curriculum. Critical literacy is often described as "theory with

implications for practice rather than a distinctive instructional methodology" (Behrmann,

2006, p. 490). Creating a "critical literacy" classroom is more complex than reading a certain

text or following a specific "critical" scope and sequence map.   However, there are

identifiable characteristics of classrooms working within a critical framework. In these

classrooms, teachers "carefully design literacy experiences that both encourage critical

examination of texts and foster personal and emotional connections" while students "engage

in critical conversations about texts where they question who and what is depicted and how

that reflects societal norms and values" (Wood & Jocius, 2013, p. 664-665). Ideally, such classrooms would feature collaboration between teachers and students in order to foster students' understanding of "how texts work, what texts intend to do to the world, and how social relations can be critiqued and reconstructed" (Behrmann, 2006, p.491).

There are also instructional strategies that support a framework of critical literacy, such as "reading supplementary texts, reading multiple texts, reading from a resistant perspective, producing counter- texts, conducting student-choice research projects, and taking social action" (Behrmann, 2006, p.492). More specifically, these strategies involve "identifying multiple voices in texts, dominant cultural discourses, multiple possible readings of texts, and sources of authority where texts are used" (Behrmann, 2006, p. 491).

It is important to note, however, that there are significant barriers for creating a classroom with a critical mindset. Power struggles between students and the traditional teacher-dominant structure can fight against the student-led discourse and inquiry needed. Pressure from administrators, district policy, and mandated curricula or standards can hinder a teacher's ability to empower students with critical literacy (Beck, 2005). In light of widespread adoption of the Common Core State Standards, many teachers are left wondering if there is room in the standards for critical literacy.

Critical Literacy and the CCSS

Many who are skeptical of the new standards see them as a threat to critical literacy. In 2000, Luke asked, "Is critical literacy in a state-based educational system an oxymoron?" (p. 449). As the Common Core State Standards rolled out across the nation, Gangi and Reilly returned to this essential question (2013). They argued that the CCSS does not support critical literacy, by "privileging efferent reading and marginalizing aesthetic reading" (Gangi

and Reilly, 2013, p. 10). However, the CCSS and critical literacy are not mutually exclusive. The new CCSS demand that students do more complex analysis than they've ever done before, but they do not offer direction on instruction itself. Some may see the standards as confining, but one could choose to view them as granting permission to be flexible and creative. Rather than read from a textbook or specific set of classroom novels, the standards can serve as justification for offering students a voice in selecting texts they care about. While preliminary documents by the authors of the CCSS signaled that teachers should not discuss student background knowledge when analyzing text, the authors revised and clarified their position in the *Revised Publisher's Criteria for the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy, Grades 3-12* (2012) (Shanahan, 2013).

The *Revised Publisher's Criteria* notes that although there must be a shift in the "focus of literacy instruction to center on careful examination of the text itself" rather on extensive scaffolding, pre-reading, or front-loading student knowledge, this shift does not mean that teachers cannot choose texts and tasks that connect with students' schema, or that teachers cannot grant students choice in selecting texts to analyze (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012, p. 1). It also does not mean that teachers cannot teach students to acknowledge the lens through which they view text and the world. When students understand their own lens, and understand that this lens colors everything they read, they draw on their backgrounds to bring meaning to text.

College and Career Readiness Standard 1 states that students must be able to: *Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.* Teachers are not tied to specific texts in order to meet this standard; the primary

qualification for text is that it is sufficiently complex. Specifically, the *Publisher's Criteria* calls for reading materials to "acknowledge the range of students' interests" and that "high-quality newspaper and magazine articles as well as information-rich websites" can be used to meet standards of text complexity (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012, p.4). As Freire and Macedo (1987) as well as Vasquez (2010) note, with critical literacy students read the world in addition to reading the word. When students read closely (Standard 1), analyze a text (Standard 1), analyze an author's word choice (Standard 4), and determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text (Standard 6), they acknowledge that these words, choices, and positions are not neutral. When critical literacy is a "way of being" (Vasquez, 2010) in a classroom, these standards allow students to read the world. The standards do not demand a teaching framework of critical literacy, nor do they not prohibit one. Rather, they are an opportunity for teachers to explore how literacy can engage and empower students.

School Context

I teach 7th grade in a large, urban, public middle school in a mid-sized Southern city. The school, located in the 13th poorest zip code in the country (King, 2012), serves a diverse group of students. In the course of a day, I teach 120 students with 10th grade reading levels and 2nd grade reading levels, students who carry the "Gifted and Talented" label and the "Special Education" label, and students who reflect diversity in race, religion, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.

Starting with Student Engagement

Early in the school year, I presented my students with a piece from the textbook on child labor. Students quickly engaged with the text, asking question after question. They couldn't believe that child labor abuses were occurring in our modern world. One student

argued over the facts of the text. "But there are laws!" she kept insisting. "That's not legal-they can't do that!" Other students went on the offensive, describing all the things they would do to get themselves out of such a situation. These ranged from "I'd call the cops, I don't care what they'd do to me" to "just try to make me a slave- I'll bust your head in!" As I spent the day discussing the kinds of systems in society that allow for child labor to exist, I knew this was a topic that would lend itself to in-depth study.

Next, we read *Kids at Work: Lewis Hine and the Crusade Against Child Labor* by Russell Freedman (1994) to learn about the history of child labor in our country. Students brought up their own experiences of work- helping out around the house, babysitting, taking odd jobs to help bring in extra money. We read newspaper articles about child labor around the world and watched videos about Craig Kielburger to learn about his work with his organization "Free the Children" (2012). We looked at modern child labor laws in the United States. To give a balanced view of the issue, we also read articles from The Week (2008) and the website TriplePundit (CCA LivE , 2010) that looked at the potential benefits of child labor. With every piece, students analyzed the text, asking why the author made the choices he or she did. We looked at the author's point of view and provided textual evidence to back up ideas. Most importantly, we did it happily. The students were unaware that they were practicing Reading Standard 1 and Reading Informational Text Standard 6: *Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others*, although with every text they became more adept at the close reading required by the CCSS. As we learned about Iqbal Masih, the Pakistani boy assassinated in 1995 for fighting against child slavery, students couldn't believe that someone their age had made such an impact on the world. Impressed by his example, we

discussed and read about other teens making a difference. The students particularly enjoyed reading articles from Scholastic Scope magazine that highlighted teenagers influencing society. These readings helped establish a critical framework in my classroom, as students questioned their own place in the world and appreciated the power of text to affect change (Vasquez, 2010).

Buoyed by the child labor mini-unit, I decided to frame the next few months around the focus on injustice that had taken root in my classroom. Outrage, or any heightened emotion, leads to engagement, and student engagement is a significant predictor of achievement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000). By feeding students' sense of injustice, engagement remained high; this was the perfect setting for my students to master many of the complex new standards.

Understanding Our Lens

Before looking outward, students needed to look inward. At an age when adolescents are trying on a different identity every day, this was an opportunity for self-reflection. We talked about the values that are deeply engrained in a person, even at age 12. I also wanted to reinforce the idea that they had valuable ideas and beliefs. Essential to critical literacy is the idea that the lens we bring to a text or situation, the "past experiences and understanding about how the world works," affects how we read that text (Vasquez, 2004, p. 3; DeVoogd & McLaughlin, 2004). Before we could engage in "powerful literacy," therefore, students needed to examine the lens they use to see their world. To explore this idea, we spent some time with the "This I Believe" project ("This I Believe," 2012). Made famous by Edward R. Murrow in the 1950s and revived in 2004, this collection of personal essays by real, regular people (many of them students) resonated with my students. We read a few essays together

as a class, and spent time exploring the website. There are over 100,000 essays on the

website, so every student could find an essay that resonated with him or her. We spent time

in writing workshop writing our own essays. The website accepts student submissions,

creating an authentic place for students to publish their writing. As students distilled their

beliefs and revised their essays for possible submission, they identified their unique

perspectives and experienced how the creation of text allowed them to situate themselves

within a broader community (in this case, the "This I Believe" community) (Heffernan &

Lewison, 2009; Vasquez, 2010). Once students felt confident about who they were, it was

time to push them to look outside of themselves.

The Advocacy Project

Throughout our look at child labor, we discussed the concept of advocacy- what it

means, what it looks like, how it works. We began a unit of study I called "The Advocacy

Project" with the famous clip from the movie *Network* in which the newscaster Howard

Beale has a breakdown during the nightly news and yells to the national audience that it's

time to demand change. He starts yelling a chorus of, "I'm as mad as hell and I'm not going

to take it anymore!" My students and I discussed how and when anger can be useful for

affecting change. We returned to the "This I Believe" website and found essays by people

who used what they believe as the impetus to help their communities. We also returned to

students' own "This I Believe" essays to see what seeds of change were embedded there, and

reflected back to the teenagers we read about who were affecting change in their

communities. We spent a day creating a team list of things at the school, local, and national

level that students were mad about, things that needed changing.

The list was long and varied. Not everything that made students mad was an

"injustice." Some ideas were "petty," as my students called them, while others highlighted bigger societal issues. One example of this was the lack of fresh fruits and vegetables available to students in the neighborhood. As Sarah (all student names are pseudonyms) said, "all that [the corner store] has are chips and junk food. I like it, but I know it's not that good for me or for my little brother. But where is my mom supposed to get that stuff? It's not like she has a car." This prompted a conversation about what makes something an "injustice." We decided that for our purposes, an injustice was any time a system (or "the man" as one student insisted on calling it) was in place that made things unfair to a group of people.

As the list grew, it prompted discussion of issues that never would have occurred to me to discuss. Many students had no idea that land mines existed- but after seeing a student add it to the list, they wanted to learn about the issue. Other students didn't understand why "the city closing bus stops" was a problem. These students came from families with at least one car, and they were shocked that a lack of transportation could affect someone's life so profoundly. As Foss (2002) and Sleeter (1995) asserted, critical literacy is not only for students who fit stereotypical models of marginalization. All students needed to understand the power of literacy and how to use literacy to affect change.

Each student then selected a topic. This was a topic they felt particularly passionate about, or a topic about which they wanted to learn more. Most students selected topics from the brainstormed team list, although a few chose topics they thought of after our team list was created. Topics were as diverse as the students themselves. Examples include food deserts in the community, implementation of Title IX laws, support for victims of domestic violence, the state constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, gun control, inexpensive

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clothing made possible through sweat shops, illegal drug laws and treatment, and paths to citizenship for undocumented workers. Students had wide latitude when choosing issues, although there were a few requirements. Topics needed to be something they had personal experience with, and something that could be researched objectively, which for our purposes meant that students could find evidence to support more than one point of view for the topic. We spent a considerable amount of time discussing the concepts of objectivity, accuracy, and bias. We discussed the lens that each student brings to each text as a reader, and how the very choices students made when selecting texts show subjectivity (Vasquez, 2010). These ideas are all essential to critical literacy, for citizens must be able to assess the legitimacy of what they are being told (DeVoogd &McLaughlin, 2004; Friere,1970). Students need to understand that "all texts are created by someone, somewhere, for some reason" and that critical readers search to find that reason (Vasquez, 2010, p. 3).   These critical, almost skeptical, approaches to text also fit perfectly with Reading Informational Text Grade 7 Standard 8 (RI.7.8): *Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims*.

I assigned students four major tasks to complete as part of The Advocacy Project, each with a specific timeline and rubric. Task 1 was to investigate their topic, finding multiple perspectives. To accomplish this task, students used a class set of laptop computers and took copious notes on their findings to share at the end of each day. As students began their research, they assessed the validity and accuracy of each source. This required students to recognize that texts are "never neutral" and to assess how the author was attempting to frame the reader's thinking (Vasquez, 2010, p. 3). We decided that "sketchy" sources could

still be used, if they were identified as such and as long as the views of credible and accurate sources were clearly discussed. We discussed why Wikipedia, on its own, does not qualify as a "credible and accurate source" but the links within it can be. This led to a discussion on citation- why it's important and how to do it correctly. Students saw how two websites or two authors can come at a topic from different perspectives. Particularly useful at this stage were sets of essays found on The New York Times' website ("The New York Times," 2012). These sets provided short essays from a variety of sources on a single topic. We used these sets as models, comparing how different authors presented information and also noting how the discourse provided by commentary on the website affected the authors' ideas of "truth" (Vasquez, 2010). Some students' topics were represented in these sets; these students were able to use the essays in their research. Other students used the sets as models as they searched out their own sources. As they dove into their research, they were often frustrated by my requirement that they provide multiple perspectives to their issue; many of them had already decided what was right and what was wrong. The difference between argument and persuasion is supported by Appendix A of the CCSS:

> When teachers ask students to consider two or more perspectives on a topic or issue… students must think critically and deeply, assess the validity of their own thinking, and anticipate counterclaims in opposition to their own assertions. (p. 24)

The emphasis for this project was on research- informational reading, writing, and thinking. Only after one understands the research can one analyze it and make a well-informed opinion. Considerable class time was dedicated to the research process.

A significant benefit of this time in the unit was that it met so many standards (see Figure 1), organically. Each lesson is focused around a learning target- the one key thing

students should know and be able to do by the end of class. In the past, I've created learning

targets and lesson plans around what was "next" in the curriculum. This time, however, the

project guided the focus of each day's lesson. Students might struggle one day, which

determined the learning target for the next day. Over the course of the project, each of the

intended learning targets had evolved naturally as part of the authentic learning experience.

For my students, it seemed natural that we talked about search terms and taking quotes from

sources; these were things that they needed to know and made their research easier.

The Power of Student Choice

A key factor in the unit's success was student self-selection. Choice increases

motivation and student engagement (Walker, 2003). Within the noted parameters, students

had free range to select (and change) their own topic.   Students who had struggled all year to

stay on task were completely absorbed in their research. When asked later what the best part

of the project was, students discussed this element again and again. Michael, a student

repeating the 7th grade, said it was important that, "I had a topic I wanted to research and not

a boring topic."   According to Tyler, a student reading significantly below grade level, "It

made it easier to do research because I got to do what I know about and things like that."

Kayla, a student who often has trouble focusing when she reads, said she liked picking her

own topic because she already knew something about it. "We didn't have to find stuff that

we had no idea about. Like we used stuff that we already know about kind of if we didn't

pick ourselves we might not have known nothing about it."

One source of concern when planning a project of this nature was students' ability to

stay on-task while online, but this concern was unwarranted. In the two weeks students spent

reading, gathering, and quoting research, only one student needed to be redirected to a task-

appropriate website. Considering past difficulties getting reluctant readers to stay on-task,

this was a victory. This level of engagement also helped students who are struggling readers.

Cognitive strategies work best when students are motivated by texts that appeal to them

(Taboada, Tonks, Wigfield, & Guthrie, 2009), and this was evident in this project. When

students got caught up in an article or website that was too complex for them, they were

much more likely to monitor their understanding and ask for help than if we had been reading

a text together as a class. They were also earnest in their use of fix-up strategies (Tovani,

2000) because they were reading these texts for their own purposes.

"Expert" Presentations

After each student became an "expert" in his or her area of research, he or she created

a PowerPoint presentation of findings and presented it to the class. The writing and creation

of the PowerPoint was Task 2 of the Project; the presentation was Task 3. The students

poured themselves into these tasks. One student, Marcus, had to be reprimanded for skipping

his Social Studies class to go to the library to work on his advocacy PowerPoint. Marcus was

a student who had a history of non-engagement, so this buy-in was significant. Another

student, Michael, said of the project, "I loved it. I love talking and being on the computer. I

loved presenting it to my friends and personally I found things I didn't know about my

topic."

Again, the standards in this part of the unit fit naturally. We focused on Writing

Standard 2: *Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas,*

concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant

content. The skills required by the standard were concepts that the students needed to know

to be successful: how to organize information, how to use quotes and sources to support

ideas, how to establish an appropriate style and tone, etc. The fact that these were presentations and not articles or other "traditional" formats did not hinder their ability to address the standard. The standard calls for sophisticated informational writing and communication, and that was the essence of their work. The presentations also supported the critical literacy framework of the classroom; student use of multimedia to create authentic communication is one of Vasquez' key tenets of critical literacy (Vasquez, 2010). The presentations also met Writing Standard 6: *Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and link to and cite sources as well as to interact and collaborate with others, including linking to and citing sources*.

Students met many of the speaking and listening standards when they presented their findings to their peers (see Figure 1). With few exceptions, they were eager to present and extremely respectful of each other. This was an empowering experience for the students. After the presentations were over, Amanda said, "At first I wasn't going to [present], but when I got up there I did great." While students often compete with each other or act out to mask feelings of inadequacy, this was an opportunity for everyone to succeed. Greg, a student with frequent behavior issues, said that he enjoyed the presentations because "when I presented I had everyone's respect." This was an invaluable exercise in building community.

Argument Writing

Only after the presentations did we move on to Task 4. In this task, students were allowed to "take a stand" and pick one side of their issue to support. I challenged them to synthesize everything they had learned into an essay. We looked at a variety of student models of argument essays and discussed the characteristics of an effective argument. We spent time in writing workshop, discussing how to transform informational writing into an

essay advocating a particular position. During this time, we worked on developing thesis

statements and providing sufficient data to support the thesis. Students also worked on

various leads and conclusions, revising to determine which ones created the best argument.

Since much of the brainstorming, research, and "thinking" of the essays had already occurred

with the informational PowerPoints, students found the writing process surprisingly painless.

As Finn noted, powerful literacy has a natural partner in writing workshop (2009, p. 215).

"When it came time to write," Michael said, "I actually knew what I was talking about in my

essay." After revision, students had an essay that hit three major writing standards (see

Figure 1).

	This I Believe Essays	Research	PowerPoints	Presentations	Argument Essays
R.1: Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what text says explicitly and implicitly	X	X			
R.2: Determine central idea or theme of a text and its development	X	X			
RI.6: Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how that point of view differs from that of others	X	X			
RI.8: Trace and evaluate an argument		X			
RI.9: Analyze how two or more authors writing on the same topic shape their presentations		X			
W.1: Write arguments to support claims					X
W.2: Write informative/explanatory texts			X		
W.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences	X				
W.4: Produce clear and coherent writing	X		X		X
W.5: Develop and strengthen writing through use of the writing process	X				X
W.6: Use technology to produce and publish writing	X	X	X		X
W.7: Conduct short research projects		X	X		
W.8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources		X			

W.9: *Draw evidence from texts to support analysis, reflection, and research*		X			
SL.4: *Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points*				X	
SL.5: *Include multimedia components and visual displays in presentations*			X	X	
SL.6: *Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks*				X	

Figure 1. 7th Grade CCSS specifically met through elements of The Advocacy Project.

Literary Connections

This unit lent itself to informational reading and writing, but literary work was an important component of instruction. Students were constantly doing their own reading and writing, both literary and informational in nature. As their independent reading is always self-selected, it was fascinating to see how our work in The Advocacy Project influenced their literary choices (see Figure 2). More and more novels of revolution and independence were passed around during reading workshop, and themes of courage, perseverance, and hope repeatedly showed up in literary analysis.

Fiction:
- *Lyddie,* Katherine Paterson (1994)
- *Counting on Grace,* Elizabeth Winthrop (2007)
- *The Bomb*, Theodore Taylor (2007)
- *Hope Was Here*, Joan Bauer (2005)
- *Slick,* Sara Cassidy (2010)
- *Rooftop*, Paul Volponi (2006)
- *The Latte Rebellion*, Sarah Jamila Stevenson (2011)
- *The Hunger Games,* Suzanne Collins (2008)
- *Nothing But the Truth*, Avi (1992)

Non-Fiction:
- *Iqbal,* Francesco D'Adamo and Ann Leonori (2005)
- *Nickel and Dimed*, Barbara Ehrenreich (2001)
- *Fast Food Nation*, Eric Schlosser (2005)
- *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, Ishmael Beah (2008)

Figure 2. Popular Reading Workshop Selections

Lessons Learned

When I read *Kids at Work* back in September, I had no idea I would still be working

on this project in April. As most good things, however, this "unit" took on a life of its own.

I found myself giving more and more time to it, not wanting to rush the process or my

students. In the end, I believe it was worth it. As with any first-time effort, there were

problems along the way. While The Advocacy Project helped me successfully implement the

CCSS, it was not without challenges.

Most importantly, I needed to embrace change, leaving the comfort of old lessons and

curricula behind. I had to accept the queasiness I hadn't felt in a decade in the classroom. It

has been a while since I have felt out of my element or unsure of my teaching. I needed the

courage of my convictions- I refused to allow the adoption of new standards to turn my

Language Arts class into a test-preparation course.

Technology was the biggest practical barrier to student success. I am fortunate to

have access to a class set of laptop computers for student use, but they are slow and

unreliable. Students often spent large amounts of class time waiting to log on to the

computer or waiting for the wireless signal. For students who have computer and Internet

access at home, this was an inconvenience. For students who do not have such opportunities

at home, this was a significant stumbling block. I often stayed after school to give students

extra time on the computers. I also enlisted the librarian and youth services coordinator to

help students find Internet access.

Another element of the unit I underestimated was the time required for the

presentation phase. For many students, this project was the first time they had ever been

asked to speak formally in front of their peers. After the first few presentations, I stopped the

class and explicitly taught the basic elements of public speaking. I then let the first students

present again, using them as examples of what good presentations look and sound like. I had

not anticipated these lessons, and the days they took added pressure as the state standardized test loomed. Their new skills eventually became a source of pride for the students, so the time spent was worthwhile. I am hopeful, though, that with new CCSS Speaking and Listening standards in place, my future students will have some experience with presenting before they reach the 7th grade.

Support Systems

As teachers across the country embark on the task of implementing the CCSS, it is important to recognize the systems that enable teacher and student success. My path to implementation began with intense learning and reflection. Before I could teach my students to master the standards, I had to internalize them, to know them so intimately that they seemed to integrate themselves into my work.

This process also required support and time. Monthly meetings with the state network gave me a place to wrestle with the standards, hash out language and meaning with my peers, and vent my frustrations. I am grateful to have been given the space to do that, and grateful that this work was supported financially by my state and my district. The intimate knowledge of the standards gained from my network meetings allowed me to look for ways to incorporate them into a framework of critical literacy; without this comfort level I likely would not have been willing to take on The Advocacy Project with my students. Teachers without such an opportunity will need to find ways to carve out time for study from their already busy schedules. As more districts and schools move to a model of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) (DuFour, 1998), teachers should advocate for ownership of PLC meetings as a space in which to study the standards and the integration of critical pedagogy into new curricula.

Encouragement at both the school and university level was also essential. My principal wholly supported my struggles and experimentation, giving me the freedom to try new ideas without fear of reprimands for veering off of curriculum guides and pacing maps. My teammates were willing to be patient and supported me in the face of student challenges. My colleagues and advisors at the university encouraged my work in the classroom and supported me with additional resources.

Student Success

By the time my students opened their state test booklets, I felt confident about their mastery of the content. They read complex text and thought analytically about it. Most students provided textual evidence with every answer without prompting. They looked with a critical eye at argument and searched for credibility and accuracy. "Says who?" and "why?" became common refrains in my classroom. While reading a text days before the test, Jessica raised her hand and said, "This lady don't know nothing about teenagers, but she act like she do. Why we gotta believe her? Just cause she wrote this?" I laughed, and told her she made a valid argument. Comments like this throughout the year indicated that my students had internalized the essential elements of critical literacy. They understood that words and texts had power. They questioned that power, and wanted to use it for themselves.

Kincheloe (2008) claimed that critical literacy should "engage the impassioned spirit of students in ways that moves them to learn what they don't know and to identify what they want to know" (p. 20). This was evident throughout The Advocacy Project, as students continually looked for more information and sought new perspectives on the issues important in their lives.

Finn's powerful literacy and Vasquez' tenets had taken root in my classroom, and

students were empowered to act (Finn, 2009; Vasquez, 2010). As a result of The Advocacy Project, three boys, all below grade-level readers and writers, wrote a proposal and got peer signatures on a petition to start a school chapter of Free the Children. One girl made plans to start a service-learning project next year based on wounded veterans, the topic of her Advocacy Project. These students used their literacy to affect change; they are what Finn called "students who agitate" (2009, p. 217).

The students also grew in ways not directly connected to text. They were more comfortable speaking in front of their peers, and listening respectfully in return, than they were in September. In the end, the Common Core State Standards were not confining- rather the standards represented specific (and complex) goals to meet, regardless of method. While I wish this unit were a panacea for struggling readers, I still have students below grade level. These students will continue to need intervention and strategic instruction. However, the increased agency, engagement, and self-efficacy of students, brought about by a framework of critical literacy, increased achievement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; McDonald & Thornley, 2009; Pajares, 1996).

Looking Forward

The Advocacy Project is not the only way to teach the new standards in a liberating way; any source of passion for teachers and students can be effective. This is the moment to reject "piece-based" units. No longer can we look at our lesson plans and say, "We're writing memoirs now, because that's what comes next in the pacing guide or textbook." Teachers need to adopt the best-practice of inquiry-based units. The horrors of the Holocaust, environmental education, the challenges of democracy, the search for identity… the possibilities are extensive. Jim Burke's 2010 book *What's the Big Idea?: Question-*

Driven Units to Motivate Reading, Writing, and Thinking is a great resource for this work. The key to success is an intimate knowledge of the standards, rather than a fear of them.

Each time standards, curricula, or guidelines are published, whether from national, state, or local administration, teachers must make professional choices about how to help their students succeed. On their own, these standards will not ensure quality education for each student. It is possible to give poor instruction within the framework of these standards, as it is with any set of standards. However, it is also possible to deliver effective instruction that empowers and engages students. The best aspect of these new standards is also the most terrifying- while the standards dictate what students must be able to do, they do not specify how to get them there. It is tiring and difficult work to create effective, critical lessons that help students master the standards. Once the anxiety and suspicion subside, however, I hope my colleagues around the country are able to accept the challenge and embrace the possibility these standards hold. Our profession, and our students, will be better for it.

Epilogue

As I write this, our state, district, and school test scores are being released to the papers. These test scores are part of the new state accountability system, and are meant to measure student mastery of the new standards. As common assessments such as those coming from the PARCC and Smarter Balanced consortia will not be ready for use until the 2014-2015 school year (Keany, 2013), the state contracted Pearson to create a new standardized assessment, the K-PREP. As noted on the Department of Education website (2012), "The K-PREP assessment is a blended model of a Criterion-Referenced Test (CRT) and a Norm-Referenced Test (NRT) containing multiple-choice and constructed-response items." Pearson was tasked with aligning the test to the CCSS, and there is the potential for

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revision and refinement of the K-PREP as the test is analyzed and as PARCC and Smarter

Balanced assessments are published.

Sixty-four percent of my students scored at the Proficient or Distinguished level,

compared with 38% in the district and 47% in the state. This indicates that according to the

K-PREP test, 64% of my students demonstrated mastery of the 7th grade reading standards.

There is certainly much more work to be done, but now there is evidence that test

scores and best practice are not mutually exclusive. It is possible for students simultaneously

to master the standards and engage in empowering, critical literacy.

ARTICLE OVERVIEW:

Implementation of the English/Language Arts Common Core State Standards:

A Forward-Looking Literary Synthesis

The second paper in this collection is a forward-looking synthesis of current literature relevant to the implementation of the English/Language Arts Common Core State Standards. A potential refereed journal for publication is *Review of Educational Research*. This journal "publishes critical, integrative reviews of research literature bearing on education, including conceptualizations, interpretations, and syntheses of literature and scholarly work in a field broadly relevant to education and educational research" (American Educational Research Association, 2013). This paper will be an analysis of the current scholarly work on the Standards, which has relevance to the current educational climate.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ENGLISH/LANGUAGE ARTS

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:

A FORWARD-LOOKING LITERARY SYNTHESIS

The purpose of this article is to conduct a systematic review of literature relevant to the emerging field of the English/Language Arts Common Core State Standards (here referenced as CCSS). While much has been said about the CCSS, there is little empirical literature pertaining to the implementation of the CCSS or implications for teachers or students. This article seeks to identify such literature and synthesize trends, findings, and needs for future research. The following questions guided the search and analysis of the literature: (a) How are the CCSS studied? (b) How is student learning examined in the CCSS research? and (c) How is teacher learning examined in the CCSS research?

It must be acknowledged that the CCSS exist within a sociopolitical context fraught with conflict. The CCSS Initiative is central to the current Race to the Top federal grant program. This support at the federal level draws ire from those seeking to limit government intrusion in public schools at the state and local levels. Conversely, the CCSS are widely criticized by both sides of the political spectrum for the identities absent from the standards, especially traditionally marginalized identities including gender, race/ethnicity, and economic status (Gutstein, 2010). Furthermore, the CCSS exist within a fight surrounding a high-stakes accountability system, which seems to inextricably link the CCSS to such controversial topics as teacher evaluation, standardized testing, school privatization, and economic

upheaval for educators and students alike (Karp, 2013). While some argue that it is

impossible to discuss the CCSS without discussing the problems inherent in the current

testing model (Karp, 2013), this review attempts to separate the CCSS from the surrounding

maelstrom and solely evaluate the literature focused on the implementation of the CCSS.

I begin with a discussion of the significance and need for this synthesis, followed by the

results of my search. I then discuss the implications of these findings and make

recommendations for future research.

Significance

In his 2012 article, "The Common Core State Standards: The Emperor is Still Looking

for His Clothes," Christopher H. Tienken wrote, "the lack of empirical evidence to support

the CCSS and national testing is stunning and should give pause to the public" (p. 153).

Although in his article Tienken is referring to the specific claim made by the publishers of

the CCSS that these standards will make students better prepared for college and career, his

call for empirical evidence echoes throughout the research community.

In the modern era of No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top and federally-funded grant

competitions, the phrase 'research-based' has become a ubiquitous element of curricula,

programs, and resources. However, policy decisions are not always based purely upon

knowledge of research, but are often based on a combination of research, professional

opinion, personal experience, and perceived moral, political, or economic views (McDonnell

& Weatherford, 2013). Such decisions are made more complicated when empirical research

is scant.

Supporters of the CCSS "explicitly promoted it as 'research and evidence-based' and

established procedures to encourage the use of research in drafting and validating the

standards" (McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013, p. 7). The conception of these standards was in contrast to prior state standards, which were not aligned nationally, and led to inconsistency in student achievement from state to state (McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013). In the drafting of the standards themselves, the writers used a combination of research syntheses, expert panels, journal articles, conference presentations, surveys of college faculty and admissions boards, and other informal sources. Notably, there was a "limited supply of relevant research" (McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013, p. 13). When asked about the lack of peer-reviewed research in the standards' development, one drafter responded, "we wanted to be able to cite non-peer-reviewed research because there's not enough research available, and often the findings are inconclusive" (McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013, p. 13).

One example of this weak research foundation is the prominence of "text complexity" in the CCSS. Text complexity is significant in the CCSS, the focus of Standard 10, and is mentioned multiple times in Appendix A (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). However, text complexity as a concept is not a fixture in the prior research. The existing studies at the time of CCSS publication were "suggestive rather than conclusive in nature" and the term itself only appears twice in the research since 2005 (Zancella & Moore, 2014, p. 277). The framework for the standards is, therefore, an amalgamation of sources, both formal and informal, rather than a solid base of peer-reviewed research. From this framework, the CCSS authors extrapolated the ideas they found significant and wrote the standards to emphasize these concepts.

The standards themselves were intended to be a living document, and leaders in the CCSS movement hoped that they would prompt academic study. Their hope was that research and revision would be cyclic, with emerging literature informing future revisions to

the standards (McDonnell & Weatherford, 2013, p.13). This expectation of the CCSS authors, therefore, requires the academic community to regularly reflect upon the literature surrounding the standards. As the body of work on the CCSS is growing continuously, it is worth revisiting Tienken's (2012) findings; there is a clear need for a systematic review of the empirical evidence regarding the implementation of the CCSS.

Methods

In conducting this review, I first searched for CCSS research studies in four major education search engines: EBSCO Academic Search Premier, ERIC via EBSCO, ERIC via ProQuest, and Education Full Text. Using the connector *and*, the term *common core* was combined with the terms *literacy, English,* and *language arts*. Manuscripts focusing on the CCSS Mathematics Standards, recently published Next Generation Science Standards, or other state standards can be found using the search term *common core* alone; the terms *literacy, English,* and *language arts* were necessary to eliminate published works about the Common Core but not directly related to the English/Language Arts Standards. I condensed my search to articles published in academic peer-reviewed journals during or after 2010, the publication year of the CCSS. Since the focus of this synthesis was research related to the US-published CCSS, the scope of the review is domestic by nature. When all possible connected terms were searched and duplicates were deleted, 446 articles were found.

An article needed to meet three search criteria in order to be included in this review: (a) the purpose of the study was to investigate the implementation of the CCSS (b) the participants of the study included K-12 students and/or teachers, and (c) the study utilized quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-methods design. Essays, literature reviews, editorials, book chapters, book reviews, and any publication that addressed the CCSS from solely a

political, policy, or theoretical point of view were not selected. I read abstracts or summary

descriptions for the 446 articles identified. From these, 25 were initially included in this

review. Upon thorough analysis of the articles, however, only eight met all three selection

criteria.

The most common reasons for articles' exclusion from this study were that they focused

on policy or interpretation of policy (e.g. Haskins, Murnane, Sawhill, & Snow, 2012; Porter,

McMaken, & Hwang, 2011), or that they included anecdotal evidence of success with CCSS

implementation or suggestions for implementation rather than empirical evidence (Harris,

Graham, Friedlander, Laud, & Dougherty, 2013; Shanahan, Fisher, & Frey, 2012; Sturm,

2012). Three articles (Burns, Kimmel, & Garrison, 2013; Gamson, Lu, Eckert, 2013; Hiebert,

2012) used methodologies consistent with empirical research, but focused on the evaluation

of text complexity in novels, textbooks, or other resources. These analyses are relevant to the

broader field of instruction, but are not directly related to implementation at the teacher or

student level. Another article (Troia & Olinghouse, 2013) described a content analysis of the

standards themselves. As the purpose of this article was to identify and synthesize evidence

regarding the implementation of the CCSS, these articles were omitted from this review. The

eight articles included in this review are marked with an asterisk in the reference list. See

Table 1 for a summary of publication information for included articles.

Table 1

Summary of Publication Information

Authors	Title	Journal	Date	Participants	Methodology
Correnti, R., Matsumura,L.C., Hamilton, L.S., & Wang, .E	Combining multiple measures of students' opportunities to develop analytic text-based writing skills	*Educational Assessment*	2012	18 teachers , 426 students	MM

Fisher, D., & Frey, N.	Student and teacher perspectives on a close reading protocol	*Literacy Research and Instruction*	2014	45 teachers, 327 students	Qual
Francois, C.	Reading in the crawl space: A study of an urban school's literacy-focused community of practice	*Teachers College Record*	2013	23 students, 9 teachers	Qual
Gillespie, A., Graham, S., Kiuhara, S., & Hebert, M.	High school teachers use of writing to support students' learning: A national survey	*Reading & Writing*	2014	211 teachers	Quant
Heskial, J. & Wamba, N.G.	Lifting kindergarteners' writing to meet the Common Core learning standards: A collaborative inquiry	*Canadian Journal of Action Research*	2013	120 students, 5 teachers	Qual
Monahan, M.B.	Writing 'voiced' arguments about science topics	*Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literature*	2013	26 students	Qual
Ramos, K.	Teaching adolescent ELs to write academic-style persuasive essays	*Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literature*	2014	20 students	Quant
Richards, S., Sturm, J.M., & Cali, K.	Writing instruction in elementary classrooms: Making the connection to Common Core State Standards	*Seminars in Speech and Language*	2012	107 teachers	Quant

Note. Qual= Qualitative; Quant= Quantitative; MM= Mixed Methods

Findings

How are the CCSS studied? A Descriptive Profile of the Studies

Interest in the CCSS has increased steadily since its publication in 2010 (CCSS, 2010), although the first empirical studies did not appear until 2012 (Correnti, Matsumura,

Hamilton & Wang, 2012; Richards, Sturm, Cali, 2012). Given the time required for research, analysis, and publication, a two-year lapse between the publications of the CCSS and the first empirical studies is to be expected. Growth in the research has remained steady since then, with half (*n*= 3) of the included articles published in 2013 and half (*n*= 3) published in 2014. It is interesting to note that half (*n*= 4) of the articles were published in journals with a specific content area focus, such as *Reading & Writing* (1)*, Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* (2)*,* and *Literacy Research and Instruction* (1). I expected a higher percentage of the literature to come from content-specific journals such as these, as they are often considered to be the premier publishers of prescient pedagogical knowledge in the field of literacy. Conversely, two articles were written in non-content specific journals (*Teachers College Record* and *Canadian Journal of Action Research)*, one journal was specifically focused on speech (*Seminars on Speech and Language)*, and one journal was focused on education assessment (*Educational Assessment).* Although the journal *Canadian Journal of Action Research* is published in Ontario, Canada, the article reviewed describes a study conducted in the state of New York and is therefore included.

Half of the studies cited here (*n*= 4) relied on qualitative methodologies. Three articles utilized qualitative methodologies (*n*= 3) while only one relied on mixed-method (*n*= 1) design. The majority of the articles (75%, *n*= 6) focused on the implementation of the writing standards. These articles looked at student and teacher behaviors and attitudes, as well as strategies involved in writing instruction. This emphasis on the writing standards is interesting, as many teachers report a focus on the reading standards at the state and district levels (Overturf, 2014). The remaining 25% (*n*= 2) of articles considered reading. One focused on student and teacher perception of close reading, while the other looked at the

systems in place at one school to support reading instruction.

The articles used participant samples from across the K-12 spectrum. Two studies (25%) focused on student participants, with sample sizes of *n*= 20 and *n*= 26. These students differed greatly in age; participants were identified as ages 15-20 (*n*= 20) and grades 4-6 (*n*= 26). With samples of this small size and limited age ranges, increased research with larger, more diverse samples is needed to allow for generalizibility to the greater student population. Two studies (25%) used teacher samples. Both sample sizes were large enough to allow for generalizibility; one sample consisted of mixed-content teachers in grades 9-12 (*n*= 211) and one sample consisted of elementary teachers (*n*= 107).

Half of the studies (*n*= 4) used a combination of teacher and student samples. One study used 426 students and 18 teachers from grades 4-6, one study utilized 23 students and 9 teachers from a combined middle/high school, one study included 327 students and 45 teachers in grades 4-12, and one study used 120 kindergarten students and 5 teachers who were participant-observers. As many studies are conducted using non-random samples of teachers and their students, the student-to-teacher ratios found in these studies are expected. See Table 2 for a summary of these descriptive findings.

Table 2

Summary of Descriptive Findings

	Study Design			Participants			CCSS Studied				
Year	Qual.	Quant.	MM	S	T	S&T	R	W	Sp/L	La	Total
2012	0	1	1	0	0	2	0	2	0	0	2
2013	3	0	0	1	0	2	1	2	0	0	3
2014	1	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	3

| TOTAL | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 8 |

In two of the articles, the author served as both the primary instructor and researcher. Some participant demographic information was available in the majority of the articles (75%, $n= 6$). This data varied from study to study, but included information such as gender, race/ethnicity, and years of teacher experience. The most consistently reported demographic data was years of teaching experience; the mean in these studies was 13.2 years. The remaining two articles reported very limited descriptive statistics.

Sixty-three percent ($n= 5$) of the studies were conducted in "urban" or "low-income" settings. On the other end of the spectrum, one study was conducted in an affluent community. The two remaining studies were conducted in diverse settings: one involved teachers throughout the United States while the other involved teachers across the state of Michigan. Three studies (38%) were situated in the northeast, while three studies did not specify geographical context.

The authors of two quantitative studies used surveys as a single data source and reported their analysis procedures. Data from these surveys were analyzed using descriptive or inferential statistics (e.g. t analysis, ANOVA). Both quantitative studies relied on teacher perception for their data. While one survey asked about teachers' perception of their training and ability to teach writing, the other survey asked teachers to report on the frequency of writing strategies and instruction in their classes. The third quantitative study analyzed data from language analysis and performance assessments of student writing.

All qualitative studies (50% of total studies) utilized a combination of interviews,

observations, focus group discussion, and documents to gather data. Three studies used grounded theory methodology as described in Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) in analysis of data, although only two studies (25%) clearly reported this methodology as their analytical framework. The fourth qualitative study relied on phenomenological methodology (Creswell, 2013).

The study using a mixed-method design relied on qualitative data sources as well as student assessment scores and implementation checklists. One study used a combination of descriptive statistics (means), correlations, multilevel multivariate measurements, and factor analysis to analyze data.

How is Student Learning Examined in the CCSS Research?

Five articles (63%) examined student learning within the framework of the CCSS. Four of these articles focused on writing learning; there is a clear lack of literature investigating student learning of reading. The first study, "Combining Multiple Measures of Students' Opportunities to Develop Analytic, Text-Based Writing Skills," investigated "students' opportunities to write analytically in response to text" (Correnti, Matsumura, Hamilton, & Wang, 2012, p. 132). Participants for this study were 426 students in grades 4-6. These students were from 18 classrooms in an urban district in Maryland. Reported student participant demographics included student race, free/reduced-price lunch status, academic achievement levels, and special education placement. Teacher demographics reported included years of experience and educational attainment. This study used a mixed method design looking at student learning in the area of written response. Researchers used data from two instruments, the RTA (Response-to-Text Assessment) and MSA (Maryland School Assessment), to measure achievement after instruction. Data on instruction was also

collected in the form of observations, documentation of assignments, instructional logs, and surveys. These data sources were used to inform student learning results rather than teacher learning.

Findings show that student opportunities predicted performance on these assessments, indicating that an increase in students' opportunities to learn led to an increase in written achievement. Specifically, length of student written responses to assignments was found to be a statistically significant predictor of achievement on the RTA (Correnti, Matsumura, Hamilton, & Wang, 2012).

In "Teaching Adolescent ELs to Write Academic-Style Persuasive Essays," Ramos studied members of her secondary ESL class (2014). Participants were 20 English Learners (ELs) aged 15-20 in a northeastern U.S. public high school. The students in this study were Ramos' own students; she acted as participant-researcher. Ramos did not report participant demographics other than to say most students were refugees with inconsistent educational experience and minimal time in U.S. classrooms (2014). Using genre pedagogy (Genesee & Riches, 2006) lessons from *Reading to Learn*, Ramos taught students to use academic language resources such as thesis statements, transitional phrases, modality, causal links, and judgments to better write persuasive essays (Ramos, 2014). This was a quantitative study using Functional Language analysis (Fang & Wang, 2011) and a researcher-designed Performance Criteria and Assessment Tool to analyze language resources students use to create meaning in writing.

After detailing the instructional unit implemented between written pre- and post-tests, Ramos reported that student use of academic language resources, such as "Present Content, Project an Authoritative Stance, and Construct an Organized Text" increased (2014, p. 663).

The researcher concluded the *Reading to Learn* approach increased students' abilities to write academic persuasive essays.

The article "Writing 'Voiced' Arguments About Science Topics" (Monahan, 2013) focused on literacy instruction in the content areas. Monahan, a 6th grade science teacher, conducted a qualitative study of 26 students from her class. Reported participant demographics included gender, race, and academic achievement. The context for this study was "an affluent community of central New Jersey" (Monahan, 2013, p. 35). The researcher sought to increase students' ability to create argument writing in science with confident, authoritative, and trustworthy voice (Monahan, 2013).

Using grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), Monahan identified themes consistent across students' essays after an instructional unit. By incorporating the themes "I-ness," "relationship with rival," and "relationship with content knowledge" (p. 35-36) into their science essays, students were able to build authentic voice into their argument essays. In this article, student learning was measured by the authenticity and clarity of voice in their writing. These findings have implications for teachers attempting to teach students to write with the style appropriate for academic argumentative writing described in CCSS Writing Standard 1.

A final study on writing, "Lifting Kindergarteners' Writing to Meet the Common Core Learning Standards: A Collaborative Inquiry" (Heskial & Wamba, 2013), looked at the current challenges for kindergarten teachers attempting to move their students to mastery of the writing standards. This was a qualitative study of 120 kindergarten students and their 5 teachers. Student participant demographics including free/reduced-price lunch status and special education placement were reported. No teacher participant demographics were reported. Collected data included writing logs, student interviews, and classroom

observation.

Working in focus groups, teachers participated in discussion, coded student writing logs, and summarized their observations of students. At the beginning of the study, researchers identified word spacing, fluency, and foundations of writing as challenges for kindergarteners. At the end of the study, teachers found that after intentional instruction, students were able to self-and peer-monitor the spacing of words, a critical skill for emergent writers. The researchers also found that student journaling increased writing engagement and fluency. Explicit instruction in letter and sound recognition and phonemic awareness increased students' ability to write clearly and read their writing. These findings are critical for other educators faced with rigorous kindergarten writing standards in the CCSS.

While most of the examination of student learning in the literature was concerned with written learning, one study, "Student and Teacher Perspectives on a Close Reading Protocol" (Fisher & Frey, 2013), examined student learning of reading, and was the only study to examine both student and teacher learning. This was a qualitative study of 327 students in grade 4-12 and 45 teachers of grades 4-12. Teacher participants were from 17 schools across 4 school districts. The article did not specify geographical context of the districts. Reported demographics for teacher participants included gender, race, and years of experience, and gender and race for student participants. Broad free/reduced-price lunch status demographics were reported for participating districts. Teacher interviews and student focus groups were used as data sources.

This article focused on both teacher and student understanding and perceptions of the use of the close reading strategy. The most frequent theme to emerge from student focus groups was "Close reading was mentally exhausting" (Fisher & Frey, 2014). The most frequent

theme in both teacher and student responses was "Texts selected are more interesting" (Fisher & Frey, 2014). According to the authors, students reported that close reading required more effort than traditional reading. Interestingly, students also found close reading more interesting than regular reading. Even though the texts used for close reading are complex, students were more engaged with these texts than traditionally easier classroom texts. There was a similar response to the questions aligned with the close reading strategy; students perceived these questions as more authentic, involving critical thinking skills rather than test-preparation skills. As engagement and effort predict reading achievement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000), these findings bode well for student mastery of the CCSS. Some students did report frustration with the ambiguity of texts and questions. This makes sense as it is more difficult to be clearly right or wrong with close reading. As teachers move to implement strategies such as this, they will have to monitor student frustration levels so students do not disengage.

How is teacher learning examined in the CCSS research?

Three studies (38%) reviewed specifically looked at teacher learning in relation to the CCSS. The first was "High School Teachers [*sic*] Use of Writing to Support Students' Learning: A National Survey" (Gillespie, Graham, Kiuhara, & Hebery, 2013). This was a quantitative study of 211 teachers of grades 9-12 from across the U.S. Participant demographics reported included content area, type of school (public/private), context of school (rural/suburban/urban), school enrollment, Title I status, years of teaching experience, and level of educational attainment.

Via mailed survey, researchers asked teachers about their use of writing to support student learning. The responses suggest that teachers have a low self-efficacy about their

ability to use writing strategies in instruction, and they did not feel prepared to use such strategies by their teacher preparation programs. English/Language Arts teachers were most likely to ask students to journal, free-write, conduct literary analysis, and create newspaper articles. Science teachers were most likely to ask students to write lab reports and note observations, while math teachers are most likely to ask students to take notes while listening to step-by-step instruction (Gillespie, et al., 2014). Teachers across content areas reported about 30% of class time was devoted to writing to learn, and the most common writing activity reported was note taking. Interestingly, only 53% of the teachers reported directly teaching the writing activities to students.

Ninety-two percent of teachers reported seeking out learning or professional development opportunities during their tenure. This indicates that teachers are willing and eager to increase their understanding of writing to support student learning; administrators and academics must serve this need by creating opportunities for such training.

In "Student and Teacher Perspectives on a Close Reading Protocol" (Fisher & Frey, 2013), researchers interviewed teachers as well as students regarding their understanding and implementation of close reading in the classroom. The most frequent theme to emerge from teacher interviews was "Questioned one's ability as a teacher" (Fisher & Frey, 2014). However, the authors did report teacher-perceived success with the close reading strategy when teachers felt prepared to use the strategy. The researchers recommend specific instruction in the implementation of this strategy in teacher preparation and professional development settings to better educate teachers on the successful implementation of the close reading strategy.

The study "Lifting Kindergarteners' Writing to Meet the Common Core Learning

Standards: A Collaborative Inquiry" (Heskial & Wamba, 2013) primarily examined student learning, but used a focus group of teachers to measure student progress. Although not an explicit goal of the study, participation in the group itself became a learning experience for teachers. Specific learning outcomes of the teachers were not reported, however, the authors note that the teachers learned to focus on positive attributes of student writing rather than what is lacking. Teachers also reported gaining increased agency over their own classrooms and instructional strategies. While unmeasured, this learning is essential for all teachers as they attempt to understand and implement the new standards.

One additional study, "Reading in the Crawl Space: A Study of an Urban School's Literacy-Focused Community of Practice" (Francois, 2013), asked, "How do various organizational members (i.e. students and staff) perceive and experience" current reading practices (Francois, 2013, p. 1). This was a qualitative study of 9 teachers and 23 students from one secondary (middle/high) school in the northeastern U.S. Reported participant characteristics of teachers included gender, race, teaching position, and years at the school. Reported participant characteristics of students included gender, race, grade level, special education placement, English Language Learner status, economic status, and reading achievement level. Data collected in this study included observations of classrooms, professional meetings, and common areas, interviews with students and staff, and documents collected in classrooms, meetings, and in common areas of the school.

The researcher coded all data to identify themes relevant to the school's literacy pedagogy. These themes included: time and space devoted to independent reading, the social dimensions of reading as an individual act, and apprenticing in a reading crawl space (Francois, 2013). Findings reveal that staff and students working together create positive

spaces in which students experience text, but the study did not address issues of teacher understanding of standards implementation. Teacher learning was not explicitly studied. Further investigation of professional development and training opportunities is needed to identify gaps in teacher knowledge regarding the standards and effective strategies for their implementation.

A final article, "Writing Instruction in Elementary Classrooms: Making the Connection to Common Core State Standards," (Richards, Sturm, & Cali, 2012) described a quantitative study of 107 teachers of grades 3-5. These teachers were from 12 districts in Michigan. Participant demographics reported included gender, age, and years of teaching experience. Data for this study was collected using a survey given via SurveyMonkey.com. The survey measured the frequency of writing activities within elementary classrooms and the genres used in writing instruction.

The study reported trends in instruction, but did not connect these frequencies to specific teacher or student learning. Researchers found a high degree of variability in the frequency of writing activities used, the genres of writing, the writing instruction itself, instructional strategies used, and the writing environment (Richards, Sturm, & Cali, 2012). Very few of the writing activities used by teachers were used with high frequency (at least twice per week). There was little consistency across grade levels in any of the surveyed categories. A follow-up study would be needed to investigate if greater consistency of instruction increases student achievement. In order to better determine implications for the best use of classroom instructional time, further research is also needed to connect the instructional strategies and activities used to student achievement or engagement.

Discussion and Implications

Research on the CCSS is in the nascent stages, but has grown steadily in the past two years. Opportunities for study should increase as more states move into the implementation stages of adoption; 44 states intend to implement the CCSS in the 2014-2015 school year. As these numbers rise, so too will the need for empirical research increase. Specifically, future research utilizing mixed-methods designs is needed for a broader picture of standards implementation; current research relies heavily on qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Studies are also needed which follow instruction to the student desk, particularly students in under-represented populations such as emergent readers and writers, middle-grades students, or students receiving special education services. As each of these populations has specific needs and concerns, it is worth focusing future research on these subsets of the general student population.

The purpose of this article was to review empirical studies pertaining to the implementation of the CCSS. Most of the current research reviewed focuses on the writing standards. No research was located that directly investigates the implementation or efficacy of instructional strategies of the reading standards, only perceptions and systems surrounding these standards. That 75% of studies discuss the implementation of writing standards suggests that the intense focus on reading found in clinical practice is not found in the scholarly work of researchers. The research and clinical domains of academia must collaborate to produce current research that is relevant in classrooms.

If states are to successfully implement the CCSS, instructional leaders and teachers need clear direction on the strategies that will bring students to mastery. Much of the current literature includes descriptions of or suggestions for implementation. A logical next step is

for these strategies to be studied with clear methodologies so that results can be generalized to broader populations. Most adopting states are members of either the PARCC or Smarter Balanced consortia. Until standardized tests are published from these groups, many states are unable to measure student mastery of the standards. As standards-based tests become more readily available, researchers will better be able to determine how instruction affects student achievement and will be able to compare student performance on various tests.

No located literature investigates the speaking and listening or language standards. While the CCSS attempt to provide a framework for balanced literacy instruction, researchers must not forget the old adage, "What gets tested gets taught." If standardized tests and scholarship both privilege reading and writing standards over speaking and listening and language standards, there is the potential for lost instruction. If students are to achieve mastery of 21st-century literacies, all aspects of literacy (reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language) must be valued. More research is needed on all standards, including non-standardized measures of determining student achievement.

Also absent from the current literature is investigation into the implementation of the CCSS within sociocultural frameworks such as critical literacy or Funds of Knowledge. To thoroughly analyze the CCSS at the classroom level, researchers must be willing to move beyond their theoretical comfort zones to investigate if the CCSS are viable within various frameworks. The intersection of these theories and the CCSS needs to be analyzed and made relevant to educators at both the university and school levels.

Of concern is the lack of teacher perspective present in the current research. While a few of the included articles were authored by teacher-researchers, this is a very narrow sampling of the teaching population. As professionals tasked with the implementation of the standards

and meeting the pedagogical needs of students, teachers are on the front lines of clinical practice. If scholars discount the expertise of classroom teachers or ignore teacher needs for professional development, potential insights gleaned from research will never make it to students' desk.

Recommendations

After reviewing the studies for this synthesis, five broad questions remain unanswered by current research: (1) What instructional strategies best help students master the CCSS? (2) How can teachers across content areas integrate such instructional strategies with acknowledged best practice? (3) What professional development do teachers need to implement best practices and push students to mastery? (4) How do we accurately assess student mastery of the CCSS, including the Speaking and Listening and Language Standards? (5) How does the implementation of the standards fit within various theoretical frameworks?

To answer these questions, I recommend the following research strategies:

- An increase in mixed-methods studies

- An increase in studies with student participants

- An increase in studies in specialized populations (e.g. emerging readers, early adolescents, students receiving special education services, etc.).

- Investigation of student achievement on multiple measures of CCSS mastery

- Investigation of performance and product-based measures of CCSS mastery

- Investigation of teacher understanding and needs for professional development

- Investigation of best practice technique and CCSS implementation

- Investigation of the effect of specific strategies on student achievement

- Investigation of CCSS implementation within various theoretical frameworks (e.g. critical literacy, Funds of Knowledge, sociocognitive, etc.).

Conclusion

As academia adds to the literature regarding the implementation of the CCSS, the responsibility will fall to the drafters of the CCSS to revise the standards guided by a more robust body of knowledge. At this writing, there were no publicized plans for this work located, nor was there a public acknowledgement by these bodies that this work will be necessary. The hopes expressed by early leaders of the CCSS movement for academic research are unrealized. Although the intention of its creators was that the CCSS and academic research would evolve together, that model has not yet come to fruition. The academic community must do its part to advance education policy by contributing to the existing literature. In addition, they must hold the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, sponsors of the CCSS, accountable for the next steps of revision.

ARTICLE OVERVIEW:

The Powerful Literacy Posse:

A Case Study of Critical Literacy and the Common Core State Standards

The third paper in this collection shares the results of original research. This research is a phenomenological case study following five teachers as they attempt to reconcile the Common Core State Standards with a framework of critical literacy. Challenges and opportunities are discussed, along with the impact of teachers' participation on their students' reading self-efficacy. Potential refereed journals for publication of this paper include *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy, Reading Research Quarterly,* and *Educational Researcher.*

THE POWERFUL LITERACY POSSE:

A CASE STUDY OF CRITICAL LITERACY AND

THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Many who are skeptical of the new English/Language Arts Common Core State

Standards (CCSS) see them as a threat to critical literacy. In 2000, Luke asked, "Is critical

literacy in a state-based educational system an oxymoron?" (p. 449).   Gangi and Reilly

returned to this essential question in 2013 as states prepared for implementation of the

standards. They argued that the CCSS does not support critical literacy, by "privileging

efferent reading and marginalizing aesthetic reading" (Gangi and Reilly, 2013, p. 10). With

states debating the risks and benefits adoption and implementation of the CCSS, this issue

deserves closer investigation. Are the CCSS and critical literacy mutually exclusive?

At the individual classroom level, it is possible to create instruction that meets the

rigorous expectations of the CCSS while incorporating the essential elements of critical

literacy and research-supported best practice (Grindon, 2014). However, there is no current

research to suggest if this work can be replicated with groups of teachers.

In 2005, Beck found "teachers indicated they would most benefit from the

opportunity to communicate regularly with other critical literacy teachers through literature

circles or discussion groups" (p. 396). Given such an opportunity, how can teachers enact a

philosophy of critical pedagogy in the time of the Common Core State Standards? What

impact does this instruction have on student reading self-efficacy? These questions deserve

analysis. This study aims to give teachers space in which to answer these questions.

Related Literature

Effective literacy instruction exists within a sociocognitive framework. This is the underlying belief that the learning of an individual is shaped by the learning, dialogue, and community occurring around him. This framework is strongly influenced by the work of Vygotsky (1987) and Bahktin (1981). Vygotsky placed student and teacher learning "within an environment in which both can participate in thoughtful examination and discourse about language and content" (Langer, 2001, p. 1041). This discourse is essential to the social aspect of education and learning.   Bahktin (1981) regarded literacy as a variety of language and social experiences rather than a collection of strategies and skills. In this view of literacy, dialogue is essential to the learning rather than an addition to it or a distraction from it. These values of community and dialogue are central to best practices in literacy instruction.

Educators have long known that best practice in reading instruction includes the intertwined elements of motivation, confidence, choice, reading amount, and comprehension. Student engagement is the single biggest predictor of achievement (Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000), and student engagement is the key to meeting the expectations of the CCSS and incorporating critical literacy theory.

One central factor to these elements of best practice is reading self-efficacy. As self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1986; McCabe & Margolis, 2001) increases, success on comprehension tests also increases. It is also possible that self-efficacy begets choice; when a student feels good about his or her abilities, the student will choose more and more texts. Perhaps reading amount trumps motivation; if a student is forced to read a high volume of

text, comprehension will increase regardless of the choice or motivation driving the volume. Finally, comprehension skills and strategies could be the essential beginning. It is possible that students will only have high self-efficacy and motivation, and will only choose texts and read high volumes, after they have been taught specific skills and strategies that will aid comprehension.

High self-efficacy beliefs affect performance (Pajares, 1996), so increasing self-efficacy is of importance to educators. By examining reading self-efficacy educators can pinpoint the underlying issues of a student with low reading self-efficacy. Not only has self-efficacy been tied to performance, it has been linked to motivation (Zimerman, 2000; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990). Taboada, Tonks, & Wigfield (2008) found that high motivation to read contributes significantly to high reading comprehension. In 1999, Guthrie, et al. found that motivation significantly predicted both reading amount and comprehension. Therefore, increased reading self-efficacy leads to increased motivation, it leads to increased reading amount, and it leads to increased reading comprehension.

For many students, reading self-efficacy and reading motivation are determined long before the student reaches adolescence. In what Stanovich (1986) termed the "Matthew Effect", strong readers get positive feedback on their reading, their motivation increases, and their self-efficacy climbs. They become stronger readers. Struggling readers, on the other hand, tend to receive negative feedback, they dread reading, and their self-efficacy plummets. They become weaker readers.

The struggling readers of Stanovich's "Matthew Effect" become functionally but not powerfully literate. In order to create literate citizens prepared to fully participate in democracy, teachers must move students past basic comprehension to powerful or

emancipatory literacy (Finn, 2009; Freire & Macedo, 1987; Giroux, 1993). Critical literacy and student engagement in the context of the CCSS present "a difficult challenge demanding innovative and local solutions" (Behrmann, 2006, p.491).

Critically literate citizens are able to consider multiple perspectives, examine socio-political issues, and understand their own place within existing power structures (Vasquez, Tate, & Harste, 2013). When students are able to do this, they "ask new questions, see everyday issues through new lenses, demystify naturalized views of the world, and visualize how things might be different" (Vasquez, Tate, & Harste, 2013, p. 16; Giroux, 1994). These students, then, are empowered to become advocates rather than victims and demand social change (Leland & Harste, 2000).

Essential to critical literacy is the "active questioning of the stance found within, behind, and among texts" (Stevens & Bean, 2007, p. 123-124). At its core, critical literacy is about language, power, and justice (Lankshear, 1997; Janks, 2010). All teachers make choices about how classroom time is spent and what knowledge is privileged. Within critical classrooms, these choices work to empower students. Teachers work with students to deconstruct the world and words around them while constructing words and worlds of their own (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Shor, 1999).

Educators who are themselves critically literate are more likely to encourage students to identify problems and seek solutions, challenge existing power relationships, and work for change (Janks, 2010). Teachers may not recognize the socio-political elements of their teaching or the power structures they live within and simultaneously create (Edelsky, 1999). However, the materials they use, the discussions they foster, and the questions they ask (or refrain from asking) their administrators all contribute to a political and social climate found

in each school. The idea of "pedagogical practice as a political act" is central to Freire's

concept of emancipatory, or critical, literacy (Mayo, 1995, p. 363; Apple, 1986; Freire 1970).

Finn reiterated this idea, asserting that teachers engage in political acts every day (2009).   In

1985, Freire famously reminded the academic community, "Educators must ask themselves

for whom and on whose behalf they are working" (p. 180).

    "Justice-oriented educators," as Westheimer and Kahne called them (2004, p. 242)

must engage in constant self-reflection regarding the ways they allow students space to

examine the cultural, social, and political structures that surround them.   Essential to this

work is the role of teacher as learner. Effective teachers seek out opportunities to scrutinize

their own beliefs, learn from other perspectives, and grow in their pedagogy (Vasquez, Tate,

& Harste, 2013).

    This development requires teachers to first become critically literate themselves before

they can create spaces of critical literacy in their classrooms. Educators with this mindset

question the power structures and messaging inherent in their own educational systems,

including the professional texts they are given as resources as well as the texts they are

expected to teach (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). Critical literacy then becomes a "call to

action…a call to position oneself differently in the world" (Vasquez, Tate, & Harste, 2013, p.

18; Janks, 2010) for teachers themselves.

    This call cannot be answered in isolation, however. Educators must be granted safe

spaces in which to work through these complex issues with peers. In doing so, they will

more fully reflect on their own beliefs while also experiencing the same critical community

they ask their students to create. (Vasquez, Tate, & Harste, 2013). If educators are to

increase student reading self-efficacy, create critically literate classrooms, and successfully

implement the CCSS, they must have such an opportunity in which to engage in communal reflection and development.

Methodology

Context of the study

This study took place in a mid-sized Southern city in an urban public school district. The district serves over 101,000 students, 64% of whom receive free or reduced-price lunch. In the participants' schools, 80.2% of students on average receive free or reduced-price lunch. In the district, 36.8% of students are African-American and 14.7% of students self-identify as racially "other." In participants' schools, 42.7% of students are African-American and 15.9% of students identify as "other" (JCPS Data Books, 2013).

All participants in this study were middle school teachers (grades 6-8) in the public system currently teaching the CCSS. I purposefully recruited participants for this study to create "information-rich cases" of intense value (Patton, 2002, p. 234). As the focus of this study was the struggle with the integration of critical pedagogy into the CCSS, an intimate knowledge of the Standards was essential for all participants. Since the new Standards-based curriculum was only 24 months old at the beginning of this study, many teachers were still struggling to understand and implement the curriculum and were not able to effectively add another layer to their instruction. To remove barriers to success, participants in the study needed to have implemented the CCSS (adopted in the state as the Core Academic Standards) for at least three years and needed to be recognized at either the school or district level as leaders in curriculum and instruction. In order to establish equal footing in focus group discussions and to maintain a safe environment in which to share their thoughts and feelings, I only used one teacher from each school. In recruiting teachers, I used a district-

provided list of department chairs and took recommendations from district curriculum

leadership and school administrators. Of the fourteen teachers I invited to participate, five

agreed. See Table 3 for teacher participant demographics (all participant names are

pseudonyms).

Table 3

Teacher Participant Demographics

Teacher	Gender	Race	Age	Years
Amy	Female	Black/ African-American	33	5
Betty	Female	White	40	4
Jessica	Female	White	27	3
Molly	Female	White	27	5
Rita	Female	White	39	11

Note. Years= Years of teaching experience.

Students of participating teachers were invited to participate in this study. For this

reason, selection of students did not involve random sampling. While all enrolled students

were eligible to participate, only 213 students participated due to lack of parent/guardian

consent, student absence, and transiency. See Table 4 for student participant demographics.

Table 4

Student Participant Demographics

Demographic	N
Gender	
Male	78
Female	135
Race	
White	94
Black/ African-American	81
Hispanic	16
Other	22
SES	
F/R	185

No F/R	28

Note. Other= Student-identified ethnicity including Asian, American Indian, Somali, Thai, Nepali, Burundi, Iraqi, Burmese, Ethiopian, Albanian, Pilipino, and Other; SES= Socio-economic status; F/R= Student qualifies for free or reduced lunch waiver; No F/R= Student does not qualify for free or reduced lunch waiver.

In order to closely examine the lived experiences of teachers as they wrestled with critical literacy and the CCSS, I adopted a phenomenological case study approach (van Manen, 1990). Rather than create treatment groups or experimental situations, phenomenological studies study humans in their own realities (van Manen, 1990). For this study, which seeks to observe teachers as they wrestle with critical literacy and the Common Core State Standards, understanding the real world of these teachers' lives and their classrooms is essential, and makes the phenomenological approach the best fit for this study. The research detailed in this article follows participants' experience as they engaged in four group discussions and one individual interview.

Procedure

Via email, the six of us agreed upon a meeting schedule. Over the course of two months, I met four times with the focus group. Group discussions were particularly relevant for this study; as participants struggled with new challenges, the hope was that the group would become a supportive environment. Information gleaned from group discussions such as these can be more meaningful than information given via questionnaire or survey (Patton, 2002). We met every other Saturday for 90 minutes. The meetings were held in a conference room in my school building; this allowed for a somewhat formal environment, but one that was "neutral territory" for all of the participants.

I provided each teacher with a copy of Patrick Finn's book *Literacy with an Attitude: Educating Working-Class Children in their Own Self-Interest* (2009). Before each meeting, I asked participants to read two or three chapters in the Finn book. At each meeting, I focused

our discussion around a pre-written questioning route (Krueger & Casey, 2009) of 8-10 questions. A questioning route is useful to ensure that specific pre-determined words, phrases, or questions are not forgotten in the midst of discussion.

At the end of the study, I met with each participant individually for an exit interview. These interviews were held at a location of the participant's choosing, and lasted between 45 and 75 minutes. Individual interviews are an essential tool in qualitative research, as they allow the researcher an opportunity to better understand a participant's unique perspective (Patton, 2002). I developed an interview guide focusing on six broad areas of importance (see Appendix A).

At the beginning of the study, participating students took the Reader Self-Perception Scale 2 (Henk, Marinak, & Melnick, 2012; see Appendix C). The RSPS2 is an updated version of Henk and Melnick's RSPS, first published in 1995. The RSPS2 is specifically designed to measure self-perceptions of reading self-efficacy in adolescent readers; the RSPS2 was validated in young adolescent and intermediate students. On this survey, students will be asked to respond to 47 statements about reading using a 5-point Likert scale. Responses in the Likert scale are Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2), Strongly Disagree (1). A sample statement from the survey is "I think reading can be relaxing." The 47 statement includes one general reading statement, "I think I am a good reader" and 46 statements from four scales: Progress, Observational Comparison, Social Feedback, and Physiological States (Henk, Marinak, & Melnik, 2012). These scales represent the four factors students take into account when considering their own reading ability, according to Bandura. The RSPS2 takes 20-25 minutes to administer, and is easily scored by a teacher or researcher. Participating students again took the RSPS2 at the end of

the study, creating pre- and post-test data for each of the four scales.

Validity and Reliability

A mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2014) was used to collect and analyze data. Simultaneous methods triangulation was used to "provide a single, well-integrated picture of the situation" (Patton, 2002, p. 557) in which the findings complement but do not interact with each other during data collection (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007).

The primary research question: How do teachers enact a philosophy of critical pedagogy in the time of the Common Core State Standards? was informed by the qualitative methods focus group discussion and individual interviews. To analyze qualitative data, all group discussions and interviews were transcribed, read multiple times, and coded using grounded theory and interpretative phenomenological analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Individual interviews are a critical element in methods triangulation (Patton, 2002). As each participant was given the opportunity to express individual, private opinions during an interview at the end of the study, results from the interviews serve as a means to validate data gathered during group discussions. Also explicit in each interview was the opportunity for each participant to reflect on her comments during group discussion and confirm that the discussions accurately reflect her views on the topics discussed. Member-checking such as this helps to increase the trustworthiness of the data (Creswell, 2014).

The secondary research question: What impact does this instruction have on student reading self-efficacy? was informed by quantitative within-subjects design methods. Internal consistency reliability analysis shows that the RSPS2 is reliable, with scale alphas of: Progress= .95, Observational Comparison= .92, Social Feedback= .87, and Physiological

States= .94. The content of the survey was validated first by graduate students and then by 488 students in 7th and 8th grades in a pilot program. After revision, factor analysis showed that the content of each scale was reliable with coefficients above the .70 threshold (Henk, Marinak, & Melnik, 2012). Pre- and post-test scores of the RSPS2 were entered in a spreadsheet using student identification numbers. Statistical analyses included analysis of variance and correlation.

As an ELA department chair of a district middle school, I was previously acquainted with the five participants of this study. Due to my experience in the classroom and my prior relationships with the participant, I was considered an insider. Although my research was overt, my insider status was relevant to the emotionally safe space created in the group discussions.

As an action researcher within my own classroom (Grindon, 2014), I had already investigated many of the questions and issues I would be asking my teacher participants. During this study, I acted as participant-researcher (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). For this reason, there was potential for researcher bias toward the hypothesis that teachers can integrate critical literacy and the CCSS. This positive assumption is inherent in the first research question, How do teachers enact a philosophy of critical literacy in a time of CCSS? I checked this hypothesis repeatedly throughout the study; in group meetings and in each individual interview, I first asked participants if they thought it was possible to integrate critical literacy and the CCSS. Only after receiving their confirmation of this belief did I probe for explanation of how they believed this was possible. In sessions and in all interviews, the participants unanimously held the belief that such integration is possible. Frequent memoing helped to maintain

reflexivity as I examined the influence of my personal beliefs and experiences in the classroom on the group (Finlay, 2002).

Data analysis

Situated within a phenomenological approach to the study of lived experience, I drew on both interpretative phenomenological analysis and grounded theory methodology to create a framework for understanding the implications of the participants' work.

All focus group discussions and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Due to the volume and complexity of data, I began analysis within the framework of grounded theory. Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) seeks to create theory through analysis of collected data. All transcripts were first chunked into four different segment types: *telling our stories, climate of CCSS, classroom instruction,* and *social justice/Finn*. Although each transcript was read and chunked, only the segments *climate of CCSS, classroom instruction,* and *social justice/Finn* were coded. These segments were analyzed with open and in-vivo coding, specifically coding incident-by-incident rather than line-by-line, using a constant-comparison approach (Charmaz, 2006) so as to remain flexible to the data. I used Dedoose software to code, analyze, and organize large groups of data. Through focused coding (Charmaz, 2006), I created 40 codes to compare participants' experiences across group discussions.

At this point in analysis, I found the codes moving me away from my initial research questions. With grounded theory methodology, theory emerges from collected data; research questions often evolve from the findings themselves (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data in this study hold significant potential for such analysis, including potential studies involving discourse analysis, content analysis, and analysis of emotional coding.

However, before venturing into additional theoretical analysis, I first sought to answer the initial research question. To do this, I chose to employ interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) methods. IPA is an analytical approach to qualitative research informed by phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 13). I moved to this approach so that I could focus on my research question and distill participants' experiences in integrating critical literacy and the CCSS to a universal essence (Creswell, 2006).

In an attempt to isolate the most important aspects of the participants' thinking, I then grouped these focused codes into emergent themes (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), creating six themes: *agitation, in the time of CCSS, philosophy of critical literacy, power, resources,* and *social justice issues*. Focus codes and emergent themes are found in Appendix B. I then attempted to connect these emergent themes; some themes were abstracted into "super-ordinate themes" while others were subsumed under current themes (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009, p. 96). The four super-ordinate themes that resulted were (a) pressures from gatekeepers, (b) resistance to testing culture, (c) the co-existence of CCSS and critical literacy, and (d) the importance of collaborative talk. Three of these themes, pressures from gatekeepers, resistance to testing culture, and the CCSS within critical literacy, can once again be abstracted into the essential theme experienced by these participants: teachers can easily enact a philosophy of critical literacy within the framework of the CCSS, but not within the current testing culture.

Results

Results of the study support the four super-ordinate themes stated above. Significant excerpts from discussion and interviews regarding these themes are provided here, along

with analysis and explanations where necessary. In these results, comments immediately following each other are from the same conversation, while comments separated by "-----" are from different conversations. In this district, Reading Diagnostic Assessments (RDAs) and Reading Proficiency Assessments (RPAs) are created by the district and used throughout the year to determine mastery of standards and growth. These assessments are frequently referenced by participants.

Pressures from gatekeepers

The current high-stakes accountability testing culture has created "gatekeepers" at the state, district, and school levels. "Gatekeepers" is a term borrowed from the Finn (2009) text; as defined by the participants, a gatekeeper is anyone or anything who prohibits or interferes with the instruction occurring in classrooms. Gatekeepers could be school administrators, district personnel, or even documents such as an instructional scope and sequence. Participants felt significant pressure from gatekeepers to stop instruction in order to maintain the testing schedule, pressure to abandon more critical instructional techniques in favor of isolated skill review, and pressure to see high scores rather than powerfully literate citizens as the ultimate goal of education. Here was an exchange between Molly and Amy discussing a recent project that was interrupted due to a district proficiency test:

> *Molly*: Yes, we're being forced to be gatekeepers.
>
> *Amy*:   Because we have gatekeepers above us saying that you have to do this, this and this, and the same thing happened to my kids. My kids had… we did all this research, we had a speaker come in, they were hyped, I mean, I've never seen kids so hyped, to teach kids, younger kids underneath them, about this whole bullying unit that we have done, and then between the snow days,

and then, of course, I'm getting emails, "RPAs are due in." "Well push [the brochures] back a few days, you have to get this done." I have, literally, pushed their informational pieces back three weeks and the snow days happened on Monday and Tuesday. Monday and Tuesday was your day to do your brochures. I walked in, they said, "We've no brochures?" "No. Next week y'all, because you have an RPA." …I'm not going to lie. It hurt my feelings. It really hurt my feelings. When they come in they're hyped and they had just come down off the high of doing their collages. That was something that a lot of them had never… because it's always write, write, write, read, read, read, multiple choice, multiple choice. That's what they get to do and when they got to do collages, it was like, "Oh!" A lot of my kids don't return work, it was a take home, bring it back and kids were like, "I got it done." And was it to the level that I wanted of them? No, but they had fun doing it, and they did it. I don't know if they cut the stuff out of somebody's book at home, some of these pictures look a little bit too great, but I was like, "This is the first homework assignment you've turned in all year." It was great. And when they came in on Wednesday, "Okay, we're going to do our brochures?" "No," "What? Why?" And then there's uproar and then I had to go, "We got to take your RPA next week."

In this excerpt, Molly and Betty wrestled with the challenges of balancing basic skills with authentic learning experiences for students. The experiences in Finn (2009) they were discussing were project-based learning units authentic to the students' lives:

Molly: And here's what I was thinking about. I feel like, again, with these RPAs and all these assessments, I sometimes get stuck in that. I thought about that. Because I did a lot of, preparing for that test, you do analysis of arguments and all that stuff in the way the test is going to be structured but I'm thinking, well that's not, what is the better one? (to researcher) What's the good one? *Researcher*: Powerful [literacy]? *Amy*: Powerful. *Molly*: Or whatever, so would it be more beneficial to give them these experiences like [Finn] listed all those experiences where the kids did this, this and this, and I'm like, I mean, that's going to benefit them so much more, but I'm so worried about this dang test. That's where I'm focused. I don't know. I was playing with that in my head. I would do more of that if I wasn't under the microscope. But would I see better results if I taught that way? You know what I mean? Like without even, I don't know…

Betty: We do a lot of project based stuff and that was one of the reasons why I was horrified that we had to give the RPA, because we'd been working on our speech projects for the past three weeks and the kids have done independent research, and then they actually gave their speeches the week before last, and then they're like, "You have to give this RPA in on Wednesday," and I'm like, "Whoa!, we haven't read any passages, we've done no multiple choice." We hadn't done anything at all to prepare in three weeks, and we'll see how we did on it, but I mean, it's all been very authentic, individual and things that I think are valuable. When they wrote their speech reflections, about half of them said that this was the first time I ever had to stand up in front of a class

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and make a presentation and I was really scared. But it's something that they

should have to do and it's an authentic, here's an experience, read some

information, present it to people, but it's not measurable on a multiple choice

test.

Molly: No, and that's what they're supposed to do-

Betty: - and their grammar is horrendous and if I'm being measured, I'm

completely split in the middle. I want to give them these experiences. I think

this is what's more important. We do a debate project in the winter, the kids

really, really get into it. You watch them display their knowledge, but at the

same time, they're missing a lot of the basic, fundamentals, knowing what

nouns and verbs and adverbs and whatnot are. Knowing where to put commas

and our language K-PREP test scores are always terrible, and that doesn't

make people above me very happy.

They were conflicted about their desire to create authentic experiences for their

students while feeling the constraints of a district-mandated assessment timeline. The

teachers indicated that the inflexibility of this timeline impedes their ability to implement

best practice. The pressure from gatekeepers directly affected teachers' ability to enact a

philosophy of critical literacy. Referencing this conflict, Rita brought up the supremacy of

the test, and wondered if simplistic skill instruction would give her administration better

results:

Rita: My principal and administration is looking at my RPA data like hawks,

and they hold me accountable to that, but I'm like, well, do I need to just re-

think everything and go to word attack?

Rita was referencing very simplistic reading skill instruction, often known as skill-and-drill. While she did not believe that this strategy is good for kids, in this moment she wondered if it would be easier if she gave up on best practice and reverted to skill-and-drill methods to make her administration happy. In different discussions about creative unit planning, teachers revisited this idea of what instruction administrators are looking for:

Amy: I think part of the obstacles is trying to prove to our gatekeepers that it

can be done that way. I think that sometimes we hear from our goal clarity

coaches and from our principals that this is the way it has to be done. This is

the assessment they have to take for us to show this, and I think that you have

to be creative enough in the work to try and figure out what unit can I do,

what project can I do, that's going to assess these standards? Still teaching

them what they need to know, so if they have to take an RPA, they're going to

do okay on it, but I did it in a totally different way. And you have to prove

that to them and give them that assurance that you don't have to do it, A, B, C,

D, and this teacher is able to do it, so let them branch out and show other

teachers how to do it.

Molly: Yes, I just have all these ideas, how cool it could be, but you know,

time and RPAs and all that.

Again, Molly struggled with the balancing act between creative instruction and assessment timelines. Here, she indicated that she has given up this fight and was allowing the RPA schedule to shape her classroom instructional time. Later, Rita confided that her school left standards out of instruction in order for her students to better perform on a district

test:

> When they added another RPA this year, I think… we follow the focus
>
> standards and then add a few, and we just abandoned two of them in this next
>
> set, because they just didn't flow well, and we felt we weren't there yet, and
>
> we want to go deep instead.

This statement, made as an almost sheepish admission on Rita's part, indicated that she too could not fit it all in. Her school's solution was to 'cheat' the assessment structure, only teaching the skills they knew in advance would be directly tested on the next RPA. While this strategy loses the intention of the RPA and abandons the idea of five important aspects of literacy (reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language), Rita's school surely was not the only building to have found this solution. This may have lead to temporary gains on benchmark assessments, but cannot have truly improved students' literacy.

Participants were sympathetic to the idea that their gatekeepers, often school-based counselors, staff developers, or principals, have gatekeepers themselves- supervisors who created pressure to report frequent testing of students. These gatekeepers can include principals (gatekeeping the counselors and staff developers), assistant superintendents, and district specialists, all the way up the district hierarchy to the superintendent:

> *Jessica*: I don't know though, I feel so bad for our principals. It's so hard, as a
>
> principal, to hold on to your job in [our district]. Everything is so dependent
>
> on test scores.
>
> **-----**
>
> *Betty*: Well, that was it. It was my gatekeeper's gatekeeper. Because my goal
>
> clarity coach [staff developer] had to have her reports which had to be turned

in. And I went to my principal on Tuesday and I was like, "This is ridiculous,

I don't have time for this" and she's like, "Everybody's got deadlines." That

was her response. I was like, "Okay, well, awesome. Thanks." (rolls her

eyes)

In this conversation, teachers acknowledged that administrators (here, goal clarity

coaches and principals) are themselves held accountable for assessment scores. To affect

change, then, the change in culture must move further up the ladder, to the district and state

levels.

Resistance to testing culture

Participants also realized that out of frustration at the gatekeeping, they had in some

ways become "lads," another term borrowed from Finn (2009). "Lads" are those who

participate in moments of resistance to those in power. The lads are not typically violent or

overt in their resistance, but find small ways in which to be disruptive to the systems

surrounding them. These teachers, often considered pillars of the school community and

established leaders, were surprised when they recognized laddish behavior in themselves:

Molly: Oh my gosh- have we become the lads?! (group laughter, long pause)

Teachers in this study reported acts of resistance in regards to what they considered the

oppressive testing culture. Here, Amy discussed her principal's request that she teach the

same lessons and units as another 7th grade teacher:

I could come up with a better way of doing stuff with my AP kids because I

want to, you know, I want to do rigorous so let me be rigorous with them in a

different way, and we have this argument all the time, and I got to the point

where I'm like, the past two weeks, "I'm not doing it," is basically what

happened. I'm not doing it.

This sentiment returned in a later conversation. Amy gave another example when her administrator gave her a deadline for a district test that she felt was unfair to her students:

I looked at her and I said, "I'll give it when I give it and I'll give it when my kids need it and when they're ready for it." So when I did finally give it, I said, "I have all your data for you, don't you worry, you'll have your data."

Interestingly, participants said they were not opposed to accountability in general nor were they opposed to constant monitoring of their students. They reported that they assess their students in myriad ways in order to re-teach or enhance instruction. Rather, participants pushed back against testing demands by outsiders- administrators or district leadership not present in the classroom. They felt that this assessment was arbitrary, unduly time-consuming, and futile:

Betty: But even I felt like this was a compliance test. I was doing this because we have to. We're complying. It was not, at all, an assessment of what we had been doing or learning.

In the last group discussion, Amy said:

But I think that in order for, well what we can do at our schools is one, step up and begin to have these conversations because I understand we all have a gatekeeper. I understand we all have deadlines to meet. I understand what your principal is saying. I completely understand that. But then again, why meet a deadline when it's not going to help the person we're there to help.

These statements were both met with agreement (nodding heads, murmuring).

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Teachers clearly did not feel that the current assessment model is helping educators with instruction; rather they viewed the tests as assessment for assessment's sake. Teachers were also concerned with the ability of the tests to accurately assess the standards:

> *Jessica*: But even just, any kind of question that has a multiple-choice answer, I don't feel like really assesses any of the standards, because the standards are set up for critical thinking and you can't see that in multiple choice.
>
> **-----**
>
> *Betty*: I would say that there is too much emphasis on testing and too much emphasis on data and that we need, if we're meeting really the whole child and the interests of the whole child and educating, a lot of those things can't be measured on a multiple choice test.
>
> -----
>
> *Jessica*: There needs to be more genuine focus on creativity and that we have to be given the tools and the structure that allow that. Because we can't teach the standards and the critical thinking and the rigor that we're supposed to, and then follow it up with a standardized test.

Jessica returned to this point in a later discussion:

> The issue I have with testing is, okay, so we have standards and the standards… I think the language arts standards are good... I think the language arts standards are phenomenal. I have issues with just a couple, and really, more than anything, the wording, because they are open to interpretation, but, in general, the standards are really good, but I don't feel like the standardized test can accurately test all the

standards. So multiple choice, short answer, and open response, can assess some of the standards but then there are the ones that they cannot assess, and so those standards aren't being taught as well, or at all. So, especially when you go into thinking about some of the speaking and listening type standards. For example, there's a standard about being able to incorporate the appropriate multi-media components into your presentation and there are kids that really struggle with stuff like that, and that is real world, whether it's career or college readiness type thing.

Here again, teachers were concerned with the narrow scope of the tests tasked with assessing a broad set of skills. There is no way to assess all of the CCSS using multiple-choice tests, and yet these are the assessments valued in their district. The teachers felt that this adds to the inauthenticity of the tests.

Jessica also commented on the very real struggle of teachers faced with students who read and write below grade level. Although personnel at all levels acknowledge the instructional gaps these students face, teachers are held accountable to students' scores on grade-level tests from the beginning of the year:

*Jessica***:** And the RPA's and RDA's don't take into consideration all of the gaps that you have to make up for.

Although 'growth' as a metric is reported on this state's end-of-year assessment, this is not reported on benchmarking throughout the year. These assessments are only used to indicate the percentage of students reaching proficiency on the standards assessed at any given time. Therefore, a classroom with students reading below grade level will consistently fail to meet proficiency expectations, furthering the cycle of pressure from district and school administrators. In this state,

students are scored on a four-point scale: novice, apprentice, proficient, and distinguished. A novice score is considered to be significantly below grade level and apprentice is below grade level, while proficient score is considered to be at grade level and distinguished is above grade level.

Participants also discussed the emotional consequences of the testing culture on students:

Betty: I mean, they may show a little growth, they show growth from the diagnostic, but they see it as, "Okay I scored apprentice again", or novice. The last one, I didn't even want to show them their multiple-choice result.

Rita: The last RDA was disgusting for us.

Molly: It was really, district wide, it was really low down so I didn't feel as bad and I explained that to them, because… but they're still heart…if they do take it seriously, they're heartbroken.

Amy: You don't have the time and our conversation was along the lines of, well, we just frustrated and I'm like, "Okay, I have my RDA, I have my RPA's and looking at them, they need this, this and this", but I'm being told, "Okay, you're just going to have to move on, because now this is coming, and you have another RPA coming" and "You've got to get ready for this". It's just getting real frustrating because my kids, I have two AP classes and they take it very seriously, and they take it to heart and when I showed them the multiple choice, and when I showed them the extended response, and it's not where they wanted to be or where they expected it to be. They're heartbroken. And when I try to say, "Okay, well we're going to review that,"

I'm really in my head saying, "We're going to review it, but it's only a quick review." But it's not going to be the review that you probably really need, to get you to where I want you to be.

With self-efficacy and motivation clearly affecting student achievement scores, students' emotional well-being should be a serious consideration. Students who feel that they are failures will likely not score well on future assessments, creating a loop of negative feedback.

The teachers discussed the apparent difference between raising test scores and creating powerfully literate students, and the implications this has for students:

> *Betty*: I read, did you see, someone posted, I saw it on Facebook, is like, "Your kid is being bullied at school?" and you know, the bully is basically the teachers and the system and the testing system and it was all like how, if you are, and this is me, born before 1985 and gone through school, we didn't get tested all the time. We took the ERB [Betty is referencing a standardized test published by the Educational Testing Bureau] in 7th Grade, and then maybe you took something else, but it wasn't this constant, and the labeling and the kids like, "I'm a novice."
>
> *Molly*: Right, yeah, like with our ESS [Extended School Services] we attack the apprentice and they know. It's all about we have to get you to proficient. It's not "we want to make you better, we want to help you think."

The group returned to this conversation in another discussion:

> *Molly***:** We're just so the opposite of what this book [Finn] tells us, and my school's like, target the apprentice, we can push up to proficient. What are

you doing for those kids?

Betty: Give the most bang for your buck.

Molly: We need to focus on the kids that are going to give us scores… I have

a huge problem with that. I'm there for every kid whether it be a novice that

might move to a little bit of novice, I'm there for every single person in that

room…We are under so much pressure to push this A to this P. Where are

your numbers? Where are they coming from? Name and claim. But what

about all my babies? I just don't… what about my proficient to

distinguished? I still value that. I had to take those off my list because that

"wasn't important." No, that *is* important. That's going to get them into

college.

In a separate conversation, Jessica raised a similar concern, more politically voiced:

So there's the performance level, functional level, informational level and

then there's powerful literacy. So powerful literacy is where, okay, here are

my thoughts on this. Powerful literacy is, when you're able to use your

literacy as a tool for social change really, social, political change and, to me, it

almost seems like, and I have no idea who this would be, or even if there's a

person out there that is even aware that this is happening, but it's like they're

intentionally not wanting students to get to that level.

The teachers placed value in the literate identity of their students rather than solely their

test score. This puts them at odds with a culture where scores are valued above all else.

Interestingly, Molly used the phrase "name and claim," a phrase all participant teachers were

familiar with. While the idea behind this phrase is to identify and take ownership of students

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so that teachers can increase their scores, these teachers have come to understand the phrase differently. They have learned that they are not expected to "name and claim" the student himself, only his score. The holistic, powerfully literate child is not deemed important by the administration; those students should not be named or claimed. Only the students whose score increases will gain the school the most points in the state's assessment proficiency formula are worthy of naming and claiming. When this was discussed, it angered the teachers, and fostered a feeling of resistance within the group.

The co-existence of critical literacy and the CCSS

As participants began to consider the implications of the current testing climate, Molly mentioned "nervousness" about teaching to the test and the pressure put on the standards. I wanted to ask for clarification, as this comment seemed to contradict beliefs expressed earlier:

> *Researcher*: When we're nervous about standards-based and we're nervous about teaching to the test, is that a result of the Common Core?
>
> *Rita*: No.
>
> *Betty*: Ultimate test.
>
> *Molly*: No, it's assessment.
>
> *Betty*: No. It's also No Child Left Behind.

This dialogue validated my previous analysis of participants' beliefs. After clarifying the source of the "nervousness," I probed further to find out why the participants weren't apprehensive about the CCSS:

> *Researcher*: Okay, because a lot of people … are nervous about the common core being used as this very structured, "Here's what you must teach."

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There's teaching to the test, it's going to become so mandated that people are really nervous about the Common Core and you guys don't seem that nervous about it and I'm just trying to figure out why, basically? Why are you not, why don't you share those fears?

Rita: Why are we not nervous about it?

Amy: Having to teach it?

Researcher: About having the Common Core State Standards.

Rita: Because I think, like we addressed maybe at our first meeting or whatever, we all said that the Common Core provided a roadmap for us but it wasn't like, this is what you do week one, this is what you do week two, it still allows us all to have flexibility within our classroom.

Betty: The scaffolding.

Rita: Yes, it's the assessment part of it, the district required assessments.

Amy: Is what is making -

Rita: It's what's kinking our chain (group laughter).

Researcher: So in your mind there are two separate concerns. Maybe not concerns, but two separate issues.

Molly: Yes, I have no real ill will towards the Common Core Standards.

(group assent: nodding of heads, uh-huh)

Amy: I don't either.

When asked for their final thoughts on the ability of teachers to implement the CCSS within a framework of critical literacy, these ideas were supported by their comments:

*Betty***:** It's not the standards. It's not. The standards and critical literacy are fine.

They are- completely could marry together. It's not. It's the stupid – It's the tests.

It's the high stakes all the time. Take this test, take this test. It's not the standards.

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*Molly***:** I feel like Common Core, Finn, can fit well together. I feel good about it. I

feel encouraged. I feel inspired, like I can do it. I truly feel that I can do it. There are

obstacles, but I'm okay.

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*Amy***:** The Common Core and critical literacy, it goes hand in hand and that

it's doable. I feel through our conversations I see just how doable it is. I

think reading it on my own, particularly at the beginning, I was just like eh?

But now talking about it, I feel as though, yes, let's do this. Let's go rogue

and take over and make some changes and really show everybody how it

should be done and how it can be done.

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*Rita***:**   Yes, I do [think it's possible to integrate critical literacy and the

CCSS], but as we have brought up before in our group sessions and stuff, that

does… the place of difference is where the level of the kids are. I can go

much deeper with my literacy with my higher level kids than I can with my

kids that are still reading at a second grade level. So their ability plays an

impact on how I'm able to implement the standards and how deep I can build

literacy in the classroom… Just because… it's like some of the teachers

mentioned in our sessions, they were doing these great powerful literacy

projects and then they had to stop and do this assessment right in the middle

of what they were doing within these projects, and the kids couldn't even

understand why. Well, because we're all told to do so. The principal says we

have to do and the district says we have to do it, and it doesn't connect with

the kids as well. They were engaging powerful lessons with a culminating

project and then they just had to stop right what they were doing in order to

take this assessment, when they were, maybe or maybe not ready for it.

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*Jessica***:** I don't think it's the standards [prohibiting critical literacy]. I think part of it

is being told what to teach, when to teach it, and having so many standards that we

have to address…I still think you would have to have the creativity or the trust to

address the standards that you feel are necessary at a certain time. I feel like we focus

on a lot of the state standards because those are the standards that are being tested,

again, whereas we… there's also room for a lot of creativity and some of the speaking

and listening standards.

Consistently, the teachers believed that the CCSS and critical literacy are compatible.

The barrier for integration is the culture of high-stakes testing, not the CCSS itself.

The importance of collaborative talk

When asked what teachers need in order to be able to do this work, teachers

spoke of the need for thoughtful collaboration:

*Molly***:** When we plan together, I am such a good, a better teacher, because

they push me and we have time to be creative. So I've seen PLCs work, and

now this year, it's like, "Here's your itinerary. I need an action plan for your

ESS, target 'Name and Claim' kids," and it's all about paperwork now.

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*Amy***:** We need this. The chance to talk to other people who are going through

what I'm going through, in other buildings. Not just the same people in my

PLC every Tuesday.

Rita: Can we have a pot luck or something [after the focus group is over]? I

feel like you're my posse now.

Jessica: I know, I know.

Molly: I don't get this mental stimulation.

*Jessica***:** I kind of wonder if we could get together [after the focus group is

over] and actually try to plan out some of these ideas that we've talked about?

This need for continued collaboration was echoed again and again. As of this writing,

the "Powerful Literacy Posse," as they have named themselves, plans to meet throughout the

upcoming school year to support each other as they work to integrate the CCSS and critical

literacy at the classroom level.

In final interviews, participants were asked to explain the most significant factor in

their thinking on this topic. All teachers mentioned the importance of the focus group

discussions and the Finn (2009) text:

*Jessica***:** It felt like a very safe place with intellectual people that I trusted and

even if we didn't agree on everything, everybody was still very respectful

towards each other and there were still a lot of ideas to be shared, and

emotions.

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*Betty***:** To interact with teachers around the district and to hear their thoughts on what

they're reading and what's going on in their schools and just the socialization of camaraderie and the factorization, I don't know what the right word is, the collegiality of that, has been really good for me…The book has pushed me in a lot of ways…the book confirms what I'm coming up against in my reality.

Amy: I would say our meetings because I learned other people's perspectives and saw that what I was necessarily thinking on the individual side was also what other teachers were thinking and it validated my thinking and how I felt about the Common Core and how I felt about things that were happening within my school and within my district. Not only that, but it also gave me some ideas on what I could possibly use and do for myself as a teacher and for my students. So I would say definitely the discussions with other teachers really was important and was very beneficial to me.

Rita: Overwhelmingly the ability to share our triumphs and our tribulations and just the collegiality of best practice, being able to share our ideas with one another, what's working, what's not working. What's going on in other people's buildings that possibly I should be trying or giving advice to others where maybe it's worked for us so maybe other teachers should be trying it? Just basically that. It's been a positive experience doing that. I miss it already!

Molly: The fact that I was surrounded by positive people who pushed me to

be… I think that's a big part of it is being around… Taking time to learn

which I wouldn't have done on my own. Taking time to read a book that

called me on some stuff, and then to talk to peers, really positive, smart

women who it called them on some stuff too and that's just really being

reflective. And then it was very energizing, where it could have been a

burden, it was very energizing.

RSPS2

Descriptive statistics were run to determine similarities between participants. Of the

total 213 student participants, 30% (n=64) were in the 6th grade, 32% (n=69) were in the 7th

grade, and 38% (n=80) were in the 8th grade (see Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5

Student Participants by Grade

Grade	N
6	64
7	69
8	80

Table 6

Student Participants by Teacher

Teacher	N
1	44
2	69
3	47
4	36
5	17

Table 7 shows student scale scores on the eight assessments (four pre-test scale scores

and four post-test scale scores).

On average, student participants reported significantly higher reading self-efficacy on the Observational Comparison scale on the post-test (M= 33.08, SE= .463) than on the pre-test (M= 31.31, SE= .516), $t(212)$= -3.971, $p<.05$, $r=.599$.

Student participants reported significantly higher reading self-efficacy on the Social Feedback scale on the post-test (M= 32.54, SE= .471) than on the pre-test (M= 30.86, SE= .396), $t(212)$= -3.764, $p<.05$, $r=$ .477.

Student participants reported significantly higher reading self-efficacy on the Physiology scale on the post-test (M= 46.20, SE=.708) than on the pre-test (M= 43.92, SE= .786), $t(212)$= -3.527, $p<.05$, $r=$ .629.

Student participants did not report significantly higher reading self-efficacy on the Progress scale on the post-test (M= 64.89, SE= .699) than on the pre-test (M= 63.84, SE= .765), $t(212)$= -1.467, $p<.05$, $r=$ .620.

This indicates that there was a significant change in all scale scores from the beginning to the end of the study except the Progress scale. There was not a significant change in the Progress scale score from the beginning to the end of the study.

Table 7

Pre- and Post-Test RSPS2 Score Means and Paired-Test Significance

| | Pre-Test | | Post-Test | | | |
Scale	M	SD	M	SD	r	t
Progress	63.84	11.170	64.89	10.205	.520	-1.467
Observational Comparison	31.33	7.533	33.08	6.754	.599	-3.971*

| Social Feedback | 30.86 | 5.782 | 32.54 | 6.870 | .477 | -3.764* |
| Physiological States | 43.92 | 10.328 | 46.20 | 10.328 | .629 | -3.527* |

p <.01

Data were also examined to establish the effect of grade and teacher when the variance of each pre-test score was removed. In analysis of grade, the covariate of pre-test score was significantly related to each post-test score, Progress: $F(1, 209)= 72.61$, $p<.05$, Observational Comparison: $F(1, 209)= 102.46$, $p<.05$, Social Feedback: $F(1, 209)= 55.12$, $p<.05$, Physiology: $F(1, 209)= 130.65$, $p<.05$.

There was no significant effect of grade on post-test score after controlling for the effect of the pre-test score, Progress: $F(2, 209)= .861$, $p>.05$, Observational Comparison: $F(2, 209)= 1.50$, $p>.05$, Social Feedback: $F(2, 209)= 2.88$, $p>.05$, Physiology: $F(2, 209)= 2.52$, $p>.05$. This indicates that grade level was not a significant predictor of post-test scores when the effect of the pre-test scores is removed.

In analysis of teacher, the covariate of pre-test score was significantly related to each post-test score, Progress: $F(1, 207)= 69.74$, $p<.05$, Observational Comparison: $F(1, 207)= 91.61$, $p<.05$, Social Feedback: $F(1, 207)= 52.24$, $p<.05$, Physiology: $F(1, 207)= 130.28$, $p<.05$.

For three of the four scores, there was no significant effect of teacher on post-test score after controlling for the effect of the pre-test score, Progress: $F(2, 209)= .861$, $p>.05$, Observational Comparison: $F(2, 209)= 1.49$, $p>.05$, Physiology: $F(2, 209)= 1.49$, $p>.05$. However, there was a significant effect of teacher on the Social Feedback score after controlling for the effect of the pre-test score, $F(2, 209)= 3.369$, $p<.05$, *partial eta squared=* 0.61. This indicates that teacher was a significant predictor of the Social Feedback post-test

score when the effect of the pre-test score is removed (see Table 8).

Table 8

ANCOVA: Social Feedback Scale by Teacher with Pre-Test Covariate

Source	SS	df	MS	F
Covariate	1830.887	1	1830.887	52.243
Teacher	472.247	4	118.062	3.369*
Error	7254.425	207	35.046	
Total	10004.826	212		

p <.05

Discussion, Limitations, and Further study

Discussion

One goal of this study was to identify obstacles and supports teachers encountered as they attempted this work. A significant obstacle encountered by the participants is represented in the essential theme that emerged from the data.

If teachers are to create powerfully literate students who can master the CCSS, they must have the time and freedom to create meaningful lessons and units of study. This means that excessive time should not be taken solely for assessment (one teacher reported losing 32 days of instruction to various outsider-created assessments). This also means that teachers must have the time and space in which to talk to other teachers about instruction, curriculum, and planning. Participants reported that most of their professional conversations are mandated by administrator or district-created agendas, and that these conversations overwhelmingly consist of analyzing data created by assessments.

This study also identified the resources teachers need in order to integrate critical literacy

and the CCSS. In both group discussion and individual interviews, each teacher identified collaborative professional conversation as essential to better understanding critical literacy and thinking through its deeper implementation in classrooms. Four of the five participants also identified the text we read as an important element in the process.

These results strongly support the findings of Beck (2005) and Vasquez, Tate, and Harste (2013). Just as Vygotsky (1987) and Bahktin (1981) asserted the essential role of discourse and community in student literacy learning, this sociocognitive framework is also vital for teacher learning. For teachers to do the complex work of creating critically literate classrooms while implementing the CCSS, they need the time and space for collegial conversations. These conversations must be held sacred, and cannot be usurped by department or grade-level meetings, embedded professional development, or other meetings of professional learning communities. Participants valued the critical thinking afforded by reading Finn (2009) and processing the information with colleagues. These "professional conversations", as participants called them, allow for reflection and growth without explicit products to be turned in to a supervisor. The mixed-school population of our focus group was also mentioned as a key component to the deep thinking of the participants.

Twice during group discussion and in each individual interview, participants in this study were asked if teachers can enact a philosophy of critical literacy in a time of CCSS. Each time, participants unanimously answered that they can. They believed that with support and freedom from overwhelming assessments, teachers can create CCSS classrooms within a critically literate framework. This finding is significant in light of previous literature (Gangi & Reilly, 2013; Luke, 2000) suggesting that critical literacy and the CCSS are incompatible.

Results of student participants' RSPS2 assessments raise a few interesting points. First,

the lack of significant score change from the pre-test to post-test on the Progress scale may indicate a lack of student connection between practical literacy and tested literacy. The Progress scale measures student perception of current reading performance as compared to past reading performance (Henk, Marinak, & Melnick, 2012).

As students regularly take mandated state and district assessments, they are very aware of their current progress. However, the current CCSS are more rigorous than the previous content standards and, as expected, student proficiency rates dropped by approximately 30% on the new CCSS-based test (Ujifusa, 2012). While this drop is understandable and was expected by the academic leadership, it is hard to explain to a middle-school student. Students are aware that their reading scores are lower than they had been in elementary schools, so they may not perceive themselves as making adequate gains in reading achievement. It is reasonable to view the lack of significant change in Progress scores as a reflection on this drop in proficiency rates.

Also of interest is the effect of teacher on post-test scale scores. The teacher was not a significant factor on any post-test scale except that of Social Feedback. This supports the parameters of the RSPS2, which indicate that Social Feedback should measure student perception of feedback from others about their reading, including the feedback of teachers (Henk, Marinak, & Melnick, 2012). The fact that teacher was not a significant factor on other test scores indicates that the increase in scores was not specific to any particular teacher but was due to an overall increase in self-efficacy among student participants.

In this study, the work of teachers to enact a philosophy of critical literacy in a time of CCSS increased student reading self-efficacy on three of four measurement scales. Teacher self-efficacy was not measured quantitatively in this study, but anecdotal evidence suggests

an increase in teacher engagement and confidence. At the end of the study, teachers arrived earlier to group meetings and stayed later, brought food for the group, jumped in to discussion more quickly, and disagreed with each other more openly than they did at the beginning. Although an investigation of teacher self-efficacy is beyond the scope of this study, it is likely that critically literate teachers with increased engagement and confidence will be more effective in creating critically literate students with high reading self-efficacy.

In his 2009 text, Finn challenged teachers to educate working-class students in their own self-image. Before this is possible, however, we must educate teachers in their own self-image. The teachers in this study embraced the opportunity to engage in discussion and grow as professionals. They sought to make sense of the texts in front of them and connect those texts to the realities of their classrooms. In their discussions, they questioned the lenses of the authors they were reading as well as of their superiors. They compared texts, standards, reports from the media, and documents from state and district administrators. In doing this, the focus group itself existed within a framework of critical literacy (Vasquez, 2010). Just as they asked new questions and visualized different ways of being (Vasquez, Tate, & Harste, 2013) during group meetings, they are beginning to engage their colleagues and supervisors in these discussions. In this way, they are pushing the English/Language Arts teaching profession to re-create itself as the standard-bearer for critical practice rather than the recipient of top-down instructional and assessment mandates.

Limitations

There were limitations to this study. The participants were not randomly selected, so they cannot be considered representative of the teaching population. Also, by virtue of the participants' recognized competence and instructional leadership, there is the potential that

they represent the elite rather than the average teacher (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). However, the purpose of this study was not to identify one-size-fits all solutions. Rather, the goal of this study was to identify obstacles and support systems teachers might encounter as they attempt to enact a philosophy of critical literacy. This lack of generalizablity does not negate the findings for these participants (Clarke, 2005; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

My role as participant-researcher also created limits to this study. With an impartial outsider serving as facilitator of group discussion, participants may have engaged in different discussions or identified different struggles and successes. However, I believe that participant knowledge of me as a fellow classroom teacher created an atmosphere of trust, which fostered the deeply personal reflection teachers achieved during this study.

There were also limitations to the quantitative results of this study. Repetition of RSPS2 was a threat to internal validity, while the small sample size of teachers was a threat to external validity. The total sample size of students was large enough for statistical power, but the sample size for any one particular teacher may be a threat to statistical conclusion validity.

Future research

As mentioned previously, this study yielded significant amounts of data that can and should be analyzed further. Discourse analysis would shed light on teachers' sense of ownership and emotional investment in critical literacy, testing, and implementation of the CCSS.

At the last group discussion, the teachers began to brainstorm ideas for authentic units and lessons implementing the CCSS within a framework of critical literacy. The next step for this research would be to follow those ideas into the classroom. A study focusing on the

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next phase of implementation would allow researchers to observe in classrooms, gather data on the instruction itself, and investigate the impact of such instruction on student achievement.

Although the RSPS2 was useful in this study to determine the effect of teachers' lived experience on student reading self-efficacy, use of the RSPS2 in a study of implementation and classroom instruction would better test the effect of integrated critical literacy and the CCSS on student reading self-efficacy. Future research should also investigate the effect of this implementation and participation in collaborative talk on teacher self-efficacy.

SUMMARY STATEMENT:

Reflections on the Scholarship

This collection of papers represents four years of scholarship. Since 2010, I have worked to study and understand the English/Language Arts Common Core State Standards (adopted fully in my state as the Core Academic Standards, here referred to as CCSS) and its implications in the classroom. As a middle school teacher, I was first concerned with the implementation of the CCSS to advance student learning and achievement. My own attempts to reconcile the CCSS with a framework of critical literacy are documented in the article "Advocacy at the Core: Inquiry and Empowerment in the Time of Common Core State Standards" (Grindon, 2014). This article was first published in Volume 91, No. 4 of *Language Arts*. Copyright 2014 by the National Council of Teachers of English. Reprinted with permission. To see the article in its published format, please visit http://www.ncte.org/ library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/LA/0914-mar2014/LA0914Advocacy.pdf.

As I sought guidance in the literature, I was frustrated by the overwhelming amount of commentary surrounding the standards but the lack of empirical research regarding their use and curricular integration. This frustration planted the seed for the second piece of this collection, "Implementation of the English/Language Arts Common Core State Standards: A Forward-Looking Literary Synthesis." While I have been searching for literature since 2010, I waited until 2014 to create the synthesis; at this nascent stage of publication, every season

brings a new collection of articles. The indication that only eight relevant articles have been located after four years indicates the continuing problem and gap. We are still in the early stages of understanding the standards, and additional complications will arise as more students and teachers are held accountable to standards-based assessments. Forty-four states will fully implement the CCSS in the 2014-2015 school year, and assessments from PARCC and Smarter Balanced consortia are projected to be in use by 2015 (Achieve, 2013).

My work and experiences in the classroom raised questions regarding other teachers' views on critical literacy and the CCSS. These questions were investigated in a study conducted during the 2013-2014 school year. This study and its findings are outlined in the third piece of this collection, "The Powerful Literacy Posse: A Case Study of Critical Literacy and the Common Core State Standards."

It is important to note an essential difference between the first piece of this collection and the other two pieces. In writing "Advocacy at the Core," I focused on a particular journal audience with a specific voice. The article went through a revision process in partnership with editors of the journal so that the piece would meet the needs of the issue and the readers. The other two pieces are at the beginning stages of the publishing process. As they are submitted to and revised by various journals, the lens, voice, and structure of the articles may change. For these pieces, the publication of this dissertation is the first step of the literary journey rather than the last.

Changes Since the Prospectus

Since the creation of my prospectus, published here as the Introduction, there have been a few changes to the scholarship. In the initial proposed procedures, I indicated I would collect student work from participating teachers as added documentation of the teachers'

work. As the focus group evolved, however, it became clear that the teachers needed time in the theoretical, conceptual phase of implementation. Only in the last group session were they beginning to imagine units of study and lessons that could evolve from their thinking; with the state-mandated assessment and the end of school approaching, the consensus was that they would attempt to implement some of these lessons in the 2014-2015 school year.

In agreement with my methodologist, I decided not to push the participants to move past the reflective, thinking phase before they were ready. Due to this decision, participants did not have classroom documents or student work for me to collect. In the article I describe the need for future research that follows these teachers into the classroom. Student work and classroom observations would be an essential part of that research.

I also indicated in the prospectus that my literary synthesis would analyze articles at the intersection of the CCSS and critical literacy, student engagement, and self-efficacy. However, as I searched and collected articles, I found a concerning lack of literature with these narrow foci. Realizing the need for research on the CCSS as a whole before sub-sections of the research could be parsed, I decided to include all CCSS research in my selection criteria. This decision was supported by my committee co-chairs.

Reflection

In writing this collection, I have had to examine my own beliefs about the CCSS and their implementation. As Finn noted in *Literacy with an Attitude: Educating Working-Class Children in Their Own Self-Image*, teachers (and academics) engage in political acts every day (2009, p. 204-205). Although I desired to remain neutral in the highly controversial atmosphere surrounding CCSS and resisted colleagues' attempts to position me on the political spectrum, I have begrudgingly accepted the fact that my work has forced me to

examine and articulate my stance.

I am not opposed to the CCSS, but neither am I its unequivocal cheerleader. I have concerns about the lack of empirical literature surrounding the implementation of the standards, and am apprehensive about the coming state-mandated assessments, which are intended to align with and test mastery of the standards. I am gravely concerned about the current high-stakes accountability testing culture, which threatens to eliminate space for powerful literacy and teachers' professional and pedagogical content knowledge within the framework of the standards. Although I was frustrated by the lack of educator input during the creation process, I have come to the conclusion that these standards are a considerable improvement over the existing standards in my state. I do not claim to assess the quality of previous standards in the forty-three other states implementing the CCSS, but I believe that students in my state are benefitting from clearly defined, progressive, and rigorous standards.

I have seen students master the standards and flourish via critical literacy in my own classroom, which leads me to believe that other students in other classrooms can find similar success. I have witnessed the phenomenon of teachers struggling to make sense of these standards and frameworks, and I believe that these teachers can create powerfully literate classrooms in which students meet the grade-level expectations of the CCSS. I also believe that this work can be expanded to other teachers with appropriate district and school support.

Ultimately, the entire academic community is responsible for the success or failure of these standards. If universities do not foster research on the implementation of the standards and student achievement, they will be forever considered a whim of policy. If educators at the state, district, and school levels see the standards as a curriculum rather than the impetus to create and implement quality curricula within the framework of the CCSS, we perpetuate

the problem of teaching to the test. As experts in the field, it is our responsibility to create

thoughtful, academic dialogue regarding the standards, to investigate the most effective ways

of teaching students, and to educate the public. To remain silent is to cede the conversation

to legislators and political pundits. I hope that this collection of papers serves to continue

this vital conversation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Individual Interview Guide

Appendix B: Emergent Themes and Focus Codes

Appendix C: RSPS2

Appendix D: Permission to Reprint

Appendix A: Interview Guide for Participants in Critical Literacy/CCSS Study

- Describe your experience this year in participating in this study.

- Trace your emotions through your experience in this study.

- How your thinking about the Finn text changed?

- What aspects of this participation have had the greatest impact?
    - Outside reading
    - Discussion with colleagues
    - Time to think/process information

- What challenges/obstacles do you see for teachers attempting to implement critical literacy and the CCSS?
    - District requirements
    - Administrative resistance
    - Time

- What recommendations would you make to others?
    - Other teachers
    - Administrators
    - District personnel
    - University personnel

- What are your next steps?
    - As a teacher
    - As a school leader

- Response to research questions?
    - #1
    - #2

- Do you think your beliefs were accurately reflected in our group discussions?
    - Anything that went unsaid?
    - Anything you'd like to correct?

- Anything else you'd like to add or say about critical literacy and/or the CCSS?

Appendix B: Emergent Themes and Focus Codes

Emergent Themes	Focus Code
Agitation	
	Challenging Finn
	Moderator view
	Resistance
	"Gatekeeping"
	"Lads"
	Student
	Teacher
In the Time of CCSS	
	"Data"
	"Gaps"
	"Guide Map"
	"Rigor" (CCSS defined)
	Accountability
	Assessment
	Standards
Philosophy of Critical Literacy	
	"Differentiation"
	"Motivation"
	Creativity
	Deep/complex thinking
	Powerful literacy
	Real/fake school
	Student autonomy
	Value system
	Family/Community values
	Student values
Power	
	"Reflect"
	District
	Parent/family
	School
	Student power
	Student behavior
	Teacher autonomy
	When teacher was in school

Resources

        PD/Training

        Peer discussion

        Technology

        Time

Social Justice Issues

        AP kids

        Grouping of kids

        Opportunities for kids

        Race

        SES

        Society

        Struggling students

Appendix C: RSPS2 (Henk, Marinak, & Melnick, 2012)

Listed below are statements about reading. Please read each statement carefully. Then circle the letters that show how much you agree or disagree with the statement. Use the following key:

SA = Strongly Agree
A = Agree
U = Undecided
D − Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree

Example: **I think pizza with pepperoni is the best kind**.

If you are *really positive* that pepperoni pizza is the best, circle SA (Strongly Agree).
If you *think* that it's good, but maybe not best, circle A (Agree).
If you *can't decide* whether or not it's best, circle U (Undecided).
If you *think* that pepperoni pizza is not all that good, circle D (Disagree).
If you are *really positive* that pepperoni pizza is not very good, circle SD (Strongly Disagree).

(PS) 1. Reading is a pleasant activity for me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PR) 2. I read better now than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PR) 3. I can handle more challenging reading materials than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(SF) 4. Other students think I'm a good reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(OC) 5. I need less help than other students when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PS) 6. I feel comfortable when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PR) 7. When I read, I don't have to try as hard to understand as I used to do.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(SF) 8. My classmates like to listen to the way that I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PR) 9. I am getting better at reading.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(OC) 10. When I read, I can figure out words better than other students.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(SF) 11. My teachers think I am a good reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(OC) 12. I read better than other students in my classes.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(OC) 13. My reading comprehension level is higher than other students.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PS) 14. I feel calm when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(OC) 15. I read faster than other students.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(SF) 16. My teachers think that I try my best when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PS) 17. Reading tends to make me feel calm.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PR) 18. I understand what I read better than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PR) 19. I can understand difficult reading materials better than before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(OC) 20. When I read, I can handle difficult ideas better than my classmates.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PR) 21. When I read, I recognize more words than before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PS) 22. I enjoy how I feel when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PS) 23. I feel proud inside when I think about how well I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PR) 24. I have improved on assignments and tests that involve reading.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(GN) 25. I think that I'm a good reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PS) 26. I feel good inside when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(OC) 27. When I read, my understanding of important vocabulary words is better than other students.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(SF) 28. People in my family like to listen to me read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(SF) 29. My classmates think that I read pretty well.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PS) 30. Reading makes me feel good.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PR) 31. I can figure out hard words better than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PS) 32. I think reading can be relaxing.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PR) 33. I can concentrate more when I read than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PS) 34. Reading makes me feel happy inside.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PR) 35. When I read, I need less help than I used to.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(SF) 36. I can tell that my teachers like to listen to me read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(OC) 37. I seem to know the meanings of more words than other students when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PR) 38. I read faster than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PR) 39. Reading is easier for me than it used to be.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(SF) 40. My teachers think that I do a good job of interpreting what I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PR) 41. My understanding of difficult reading materials has improved.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PS) 42. I feel good about my ability to read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(OC) 43. I am more confident in my reading than other students.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PS) 44. Deep down, I like to read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PR) 45. I can analyze what I read better than before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(SF) 46. My teachers think that my reading is fine.	SA	A	U	D	SD
(PR) 47. Vocabulary words are easier for me to understand when I read now.	SA	A	U	D	SD

Student Name _____

Teacher _____

Grade _____ Date _____

Scoring Key: 5 = Strongly Agree (SA)
4 = Agree (A)
3 = Undecided (U)
2 = Disagree (D)
1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)

PROGRESS	OBSERVATIONAL COMPARISON	SOCIAL FEEDBACK	PHYSIOLOGICAL STATES
2._____	5. _____	4. _____	1. _____
3._____	10. _____	8. _____	6. _____
7._____	12. _____	11. _____	14. _____
9._____	13. _____	16. _____	17. _____
18._____	15. _____	28. _____	22. _____
19._____	20. _____	29. _____	23. _____
21._____	27._____	36. _____	26. _____
24._____	37._____	40. _____	30. _____
31._____	43._____	46. _____	32._____
33._____			34._____
35._____			42._____
38._____			44._____
39._____			
41._____			
45._____			
47._____			

Raw
Score   _____ of 80   _____ of 45   _____ of 45   _____ of 60

Percentile _____   _____   _____   _____

	PROGRESS	OBSERVATIONAL COMPARISON	SOCIAL FEEDBACK	PHYSIOLOGICAL STATES
High	74+	39+	35+	50+
Above Average	66–73	34–38	31–34	44–49
Average	60–65	28–33	28–30	35–43
Low	48–	28–	27–	34

Appendix D: Permission to Reprint

Katherine Grindon, Advocacy at the Core: Inquiry and Empowerment in the Time of

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Common Core State Standards
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Dissertation:
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M.A.T. in Secondary English   2005
Outstanding Student Award, College of Education and
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Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN
B.A. in English   2003
Minor: Music History
Magna Cum Laude
Boston University, London, England
Boston University Study Abroad Program   2002

CERTIFICATIONS

Level 1, *Kentucky School Principal Certification*   2014 – 2019

Early Adolescent English/Language Arts, *National Board Certification*   2007 – 2017

English/Language Arts Grades 5-9, *Kentucky Teaching Certification*   2003 – 2017

English/Language Arts Grades 8-12, *Kentucky Teaching Certification*   2003 – 2017

PUBLICATIONS

Grindon, K. (2014). Advocacy at the core: Inquiry and empowerment in the time of Common Core State Standards. *Language Arts, 91*(4), 251-266.

PRESENTATIONS

The Powerful Literacy Posse: Empowering Teachers to Enact
Critical Literacy in a Time of Common Core State Standards
University of Cincinnati, Spring Research Conference
Cincinnati, OH   2014

Teaching Middle School Language Arts:
Everything You Were Afraid to Ask
Jefferson County Public Schools, New Teacher Induction
Louisville, KY   2013

Putting Yourself on Paper: Writing the NBCT Way
Jefferson County Public Schools
Louisville, KY   2012, 2013

How Do You Know What They Know?
Assessment Literacy and the New Common Core Standards
National Middle School Association, National Convention,
Louisville, KY   2011

How Do You Know What They Know?
Assessment Literacy and the New Common Core Standards
Kentucky Department of Education,
Teacher Leadership Network
Shelbyville, KY   2011

Do You See What I See?
Jefferson County Public Schools,
MAGIC Leadership Conference
Louisville, KY   2010

Improving Writing Ability and Identify Among
At-Risk Students Using Playwriting Techniques
in Partnership with Community-Based Theatre Professionals"
National Council of Teachers of English,
National Convention
Nashville, TN   2006

K-12 EDUCATION EXPERIENCE
  Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, KY
  Literacy Goal Clarity Coach   **2014 - Present**
  Worked with curriculum specialists to create and deliver
  professional development to teachers across the district,
  develop curriculum maps, and write district benchmark
  assessments. Coached individual teachers across content
  areas on literacy instruction, co-taught with teachers,
  mentored intern teachers, facilitated Professional Learning
  Community meetings, advised principals on literacy policy,
  curriculum, and instruction.

  Meyzeek Middle School, Louisville, KY
  Literacy Lead Teacher and Department Chair   **2005 - 2014**
  Scheduled students into appropriate reading interventions,
  created and implemented building-wide writing curriculum,
  compiled and wrote annual writing program review, led
  students and faculty to a 25-point index increase (64 to 89)
  on state standardized writing test (2005-2009), led students
  and faculty to a 31-point decrease in percent novice
  performance (33% to 2%) on state standardized writing test,
  mentored new teachers, chaired 10-member department,
  supervised yearly department budget ($2,500), trained all
  faculty members in reading and writing instruction and
  assessment, acted as liaison between faculty and district
  advisors, supervised textbook adoption ($45,000), advised
  principal in all departmental hiring, scheduling, and staffing
  decisions, served on Leadership Team assisting principal in
  policy and operational decisions.

University Mentor Teacher   **2008 - 2013**
Supervised student teachers, assisting with lesson and unit development and classroom management, worked in collaboration with university faculty, administered all grades.

Elected Member, Site-Based Decision Making Committee   **2011 - 2013,**
Approved hires and staffing decisions, created yearly school   **2005 - 2007**
budget, revised curricula and schedules.

Teacher   **2003 - 2014**
Taught Language Arts (reading, writing, language, speaking and listening) to Advanced Program, comprehensive, and special education middle school students. Consistently led students to the school's highest test scores in reading and writing.

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION EXPERIENCE
University of Louisville, Louisville, KY
Adjunct Faculty   **2011-2013**
Developed syllabus and overall course structure, delivered instruction, administered all grades.
Courses taught:
EDAP 636: Advanced Reading Methods
EDAP 614: Supporting Struggling Readers and Writers

RELATED EXPERIENCE
Scholastic Publishing, New York, NY
Teacher Consultant- SCOPE Magazine   **2011 - Present**
Advised editorial staff on classroom implementation and alignment with state and national standards.
Kentucky Teacher Leadership Network
Jefferson County Middle School Representative   **2010-2013**
Advised state curriculum specialists on classroom implementation of Kentucky
Core Academic Standards (CCSS), deconstructed national CCSS standards for use in Kentucky classrooms, acted as liaison between state and district advisors.

Jefferson County Public Schools, Louisville, KY
NBCT Candidate Support Provider   **2008 - Present**
Mentored first-year and advanced candidates for National Board certification.

Atlanta Young Singers of Callanwolde, Atlanta, GA
Camp Director   **2009 - Present**
Supervised staff of 15, organized daily schedules, activities,
and classes for over 100 campers, maintained and processed
financial, medical, and residential records.
Catholic Community of Epiphany, Louisville, KY
Parish Pastoral Council, Representative for Social Responsibility   2010 - 2013
Chaired Social Responsibility Steering Committee,
collaborated with Minister of Social Responsibility to
oversee $20,000 budget, served on Parish Pastoral Council
advising Pastor on budget and operational decisions.

MEMBERSHIPS
American Educational Research Association
ASCD (formerly The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development)
International Reading Association
National Council of Teachers of English