Understanding Elementary Teachers’ Perceptions About Their Experiences Implementing The Common Core State Standards

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING ELEMENTARY TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES IMPLEMENTING THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

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This phenomenological study examined four elementary teachers’ decision-making regarding instruction using the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Three research questions guided this study: (1) What are elementary teachers’ perceptions about their experiences implementing CCSS initiated by the district and the professional learning (PL) they received? (2) How do elementary teachers describe their decision making and changes in instruction based on the PL they received when implementing the CCSS? and (3) What successes and challenges have elementary teachers experienced in using the CCSS in their instructional delivery? Fullan’s change theory as well as Hattie’s mindframes provided the theoretical framework. Data were collected through teacher interviews, a focus group, bi-weekly reflections, and teacher artifacts. The study’s findings revealed major themes regarding teachers’ attitudes toward CCSS skills instruction, decisions regarding the standard learning progressions, and professional learning needs associated with the reform initiative. Several implications arose from this study. The first is that stakeholders need to follow a strategic plan when implementing a reform as well as provide PL based on the needs of teachers. The second is, since reforms are typically top-down in education, teachers need to embody certain mindframes to combat the challenges that may be associated with implementing reform in the elementary classroom.
Several recommendations emerged from this study including a reconceptualized five-step approach to delivery of educational reform that incorporates Fullan’s change theory as well as Hattie’s mindframes for all stakeholders to consider when starting and carrying out any reform in an educational setting.
UNDERSTANDING ELEMENTARY TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES IMPLEMENTING THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

BY

ANGELYN DIECKMAN
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Doctoral Director:
Elizabeth A. Wilkins
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Courage, sacrifice, determination, commitment, toughness, heart, talent, guts.
That’s what little girls are made of. (Bethany Hamilton)

I am grateful and fortunate that I had the kind association as well as the supervision of Dr. Elizabeth Wilkins as my mentor and guide. Her exemplary guidance, consistent encouragement, and careful monitoring throughout my studies and writing have been so great that even my most profound gratitude is not enough.

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I also want to thank my colleagues and friends who have continued to push me and encourage me to finish. The only good dissertation is a done dissertation.

Lastly, I want to take the opportunity to express a great sense of gratitude to my family for all of the times that I missed an event, experience, or commitment. I am grateful for your continued love, support, and understanding.
DEDICATION

This study is wholeheartedly dedicated to my cherished husband and best friend, who through this journey has continued to be my shoulder to cry on and my partner in happiness and has celebrated each step of this journey with me. To my beloved parents, who have been my biggest fans and supporters on this journey. To my children who have been a source of inspiration and have given me strength when I thought of giving up. To my, relatives, mentors, friends, and classmates who have shared their words of advice and encouragement. And lastly, I dedicate this study to three very important people in my life whom I lost during the writing of my dissertation: Joseph Dieckman, Don Dybowski, and Laura Deutsch. You are forever in my heart and I thank you for your guidance, strength, and unconditional love.
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Educational change is a term Michael Fullan (2006) refers to as a paradigm shift within education as well as related reform efforts. Fullan explains that the shifting perspectives within the field of education are most often the result of a new-found awareness concerning ideas or needs, and this awareness is often followed by a desire to adjust curriculum to include new knowledge. However, if there is not a clear understanding of why the change is occurring, the reform will not transpire as intended. Thus, there is a need to understand how educators interpret paradigm shifts when change occurs as well as understand the purpose for implementing the change in the first place. One such educational change includes implementing the Common Core State Standards (2010), which explain what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade and what it looks like to be college and career ready. CCSS has affected millions of students and teachers (Brooks & Dietz, 2013) and is a prime example of a reform effort that has prompted new professional learning (PL) and instructional practice decisions made by teachers.

The change to CCSS ranks among the most comprehensive educational reforms to impact teachers in the nation’s history (Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013). Fang (1996) found that although teachers’ instructional practices in the classroom are affected by their beliefs, there is a lack of understanding about how teachers’ beliefs affect their practices. So if teachers are feeling less confident in their ability to teach effectively utilizing the CCSS, it is likely that their performance
also diminishes. Research has shown that elementary teachers who believe they are performing well may or may not be, but those who believe they are ineffective almost always are (Kray & Haselhuhn, 2007; Pajares & Usher, 2008). Due to the increased demands on elementary teachers to be experts in content-area standards (Murphy & Torff, 2016), the focus of this research was on K-5 educators and their perception of the CCSS. An emphasis on teachers’ instructional delivery and the CCSS impact on their instruction in the elementary classroom were also explored.

Historical Background About Learning Standards

Learning standards in the United States historically have been independently developed by each state’s Department of Education. The creation of standards-based reform efforts dating from the 1980s through 2000s involved developing state standards with the goal of linking them to curriculum, professional development (PD), and assessments (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013). This involved connecting assessment to identified grade level learning standards. Yet the standards were quite different across the United States concerning rigor, content, and alignment (Accountability Works, 2012). Some districts only mandated standards for Grades 3-12, including their own levels of determined proficiency (Common Core State Standards, 2017). This created a dilemma for policymakers when they began comparing student performance across the country. These discrepancies intensified the accountability movement in the 1990s and into the 2000s with the passage of No Child Left Behind. This reform mandated all states to have rigorous standards in place, but each state still had the ability to choose the standards and content for each grade level. It was not until the development and adoption of the CCSS in 2009 for the subjects of English language arts and mathematics that an observable relationship among
standards-based classroom practice and student assessment became apparent. This reform mandated standards and performance levels for Grades K-12 across all CCSS adoption states.

According to Porter, Fusarelli, and Fusarelli (2014), the CCSS are “the first curriculum reform of their kind in the United States to emanate from the national level, be filtered through state and district levels, and ultimately be enacted by individual teachers in the classroom” (p. 4). CCSS differ from past reforms in that students in all 46 CCSS-adopted states are held to the same high standards at each grade level K-12 (Cochran-Smith, 2012). However, the CCSS, like many other previous educational reforms, were met with unclear expectations regarding how they would help teachers meet rigorous instructional goals (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009). With the increase in federal control over district decision making initiated by the CCSS initiative, many educators struggled to keep up with educational expectations, defined as any effort to set the same high educational standards for all students in a class, school, or education system (Great Schools Partnerships, 2014). The barriers to meeting these expectations included lack of support during implementation (Cochran-Smith, 2012), how the reform matched the teachers’ practices and values (Bee Bee, 2008; Chan, 2010), and potential teacher burnout (Pyphalto, Pietarinen, & Salmela-Aro, 2011). To combat some of these identified obstacles as well as increase the likelihood of a national curriculum, the federal government created a monetary incentive to states who adopted the CCSS (Bruns, Filmer, & Patrinos, 2014).

Since the federally driven standards included monetary grants awarded to the states who adopted them, Illinois embarked on this curricular movement in 2010. Districts had three years to prepare to implement the CCSS, with related “PD” expected to occur in the years leading up to full implementation in 2013. The term PD was generally used to describe the learning designed for teachers to improve their competency or skill level in the classroom. The term was described
as a “sit and get” or passive experience (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). Murphy and Regenstein (2012) reported that states implemented PD leading up to the CCSS implementation as “business-as-usual by continuing to utilize textbooks, paper assessments, one-size-fits all workshops and face-to-face, one-time sit and get PD” (p. 48). But districts began to realize that traditional PD was not going to support the CCSS. Thus, in turn the more modern term of “professional learning” (PL) evolved (Moir, 2013). Although PL embodies many of the same ideas and goals of PD, some of the biggest shifts are that PL encourages interactive learning strategies rather than rote development techniques, the instruction is targeted and based on student and teacher needs, and the learning is sustained through follow-up and coaching as well as being grounded in principles of adult learning theory (Learning Forward, 2019). Many believe the idea of PD is outdated, which is why many school districts are implementing a system of PL instead (Schaffhauser, 2016)

Given that, full implementation for public school districts did not take place in Illinois until the 2013-14 school year, and PL associated with the CCSS implementation was left to individual districts and school-based sites (Accountability Works, 2012; Murphy & Regenstein, 2012) rather than federally mandated. However, with the adoption of the CCSS, the expectations and rigor of the K-12 curriculum resulted in a dramatic change. This increase in rigor forced a shift toward greater accountability and a growing demand for proof of effectiveness and efficiency in education (Brooks & Dietz, 2013). Accountability measures are not new to teachers, however, continuous educational shifts that have transpired across reform efforts have made teachers leery consumers. As such, teachers’ dispositions and perceptions toward reform often do not involve a desire to change (Dottin, 2009), as exemplified by the CCSS. Thus, there is a need for all stakeholders – including teachers, administrators, and policymakers – to
understand the implications of reform so teachers may be informed consumers and understand why the change is needed and how to make the change initiative successful (Brooks & Dietz, 2013; Hall, Hutchison, & White, 2015).

Recent research has revealed effective ways teachers work through the implementation process when faced with changes in standards and curriculum (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). Porter et al. (2011) explained how the CCSS were designed as an effort to centralize academic rigor across the United States. Thus far, the research has not shown the centralization of rigor across the states as proposed by Peterson, Henderson, West, and Barrows (2017). As of August 2015, 42 states had adopted the CCSS, with four states rejecting the adoption and implementing the standards on their own timeline (Common Core State Standards, 2017). These states had yet to adopt the curriculum, claiming the CCSS do not guarantee higher test scores and are not tailored to meet the diverse needs of all the nation’s schools (Finn, 2010).

In unifying educational programs through academic rigor, an increase in student achievement was also an expected outcome of the CCSS (Kern, 2011). Thus, through this reform initiative, teachers and students are expected to rise to the rigorous standards being implemented. The research directly related to school reform initiatives stresses the importance of teachers’ learning experiences at school sites (Putnam & Borko, 2000) as well as classroom structures, available resources, and student population (Hattie, 2008). Since the CCSS were designed to improve students’ preparation for both college and career readiness, if the contexts are not clear for teachers implementing the reform and the process for change is not clear, disequilibrium can occur (Accountability Works, 2012; Hall et al., 2015).

For CCSS implementation to be effective in the classroom, PL directly related to the instructional needs of the teacher must occur (Burks, Beziat, Danley, Davis, Lowery, & Lucas,
Studies conducted over the past two decades have connected high-quality PL to standards-based reform implementation and student achievement (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Fishman, Marx, Best, & Tal, 2003; Guskey, 2002; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Killion, 2017). The correlation between high-quality PL in implementation of the CCSS and student learning can be seen in Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. This newest reform movement is dedicated to hiring and sustaining high-quality and effective educators at all levels to implement the rigorous CCSS (Risko & Vogt, 2016). ESSA replaced NCLB, potentially giving more control to states in determining what standards all students must achieve. States and districts were to create plans to “close the achievement gap, increase equity, improve the quality of instruction, and increase outcomes for all students” (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

However, the literature is limited regarding effective plans that districts have created specific to the CCSS and the PL practices used by districts (Hipsher, 2014).

Problem and Purpose Statements

One of the most recent and controversial reforms in Illinois is full implementation of CCSS by all Illinois public school districts in 2013 (Ravitch, 2013; Rentner, 2013). Reforms are not only prevalent in education, but they have also historically focused on student achievement (OECD, 2010). Current research on CCSS is limited regarding the impact on middle and high school students acquiring needed skills to be college and career ready (Hiebert & Mesmer, 2013). Furthermore, past research has primarily focused on how students have changed since the reform in regard to preparing them to be college and career ready or focused on only one content area in the standards, instead of the standards’ impact on student achievement as a whole (Dingman, Teuscher, Newton, & Kasmer, 2013; Faxon-Mills, Hamilton, Rudnick, & Stetcher,
Furthermore, research conducted on this topic has focused on middle and high school educators as the unit of analysis, but not specifically elementary teachers (Dingman et al., 2013; Faxon-Mills et al., 2013; Hall, et al., 2015). Several studies have been cited regarding PL during reform efforts in the United States; however, there is a void in the research when it comes to CCSS and PL connected to teacher perceptions (Cohen & Moffitt, 2009; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Killion, 2017). In fact, a poll of 500 teachers in May 2012 showed that 77% of teachers supported the CCSS, while 18% opposed the reform in the states that had adopted standards (Achieve the Core, 2012). Another statistic taken from the survey was that 13% of teachers responded that they knew “not much” or “nothing” about CCSS (Achieve, 2012, p. 2). Taken collectively, concern about how prepared teachers are in states that have adopted Common Core standards and how late-adopter states are learning from the previous adoption states warrants study.

CCSS were implemented in classrooms as an attempt to raise achievement levels and to prepare all students to be college and career ready (Ash, 2011). However, there is little research on the instructional practices being used by elementary teachers when implementing the standards in their classrooms (Finkelstein et al., 2013; Mathis, 2010). Coupled with the lack of research on instructional practices and the effects of CCSS on elementary teachers’ instructional decisions (Hall, Hutchison, & White, 2015; Joong & Ryan, 2013), additional research would enhance teachers’ instructional decision making if it were understood that CCSS-aligned instructional practices influence student growth. Furthermore, PL is quintessential to any reform that involves information being learned and utilized by all teachers in their classroom instruction to improve student learning (Gulamhussein, 2013; Killion, 2017). However, research is lacking in relation to the continual change in education and how these characteristics of reform have
altered elementary teachers’ instructional decisions (Chan, 2010; Dottin, 2009; Guskey, 2002).

Finally, limited research has been done on how elementary teachers feel about the reform with a focus on the factors that shape their perceptions (Hall et al., 2015; Joong & Ryan, 2013). Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine elementary teachers’ perceptions of instructional decision making and delivery of the CCSS as part of a districtwide reform initiative.

Research Questions

The current study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are elementary teachers’ perceptions about their experiences implementing Common Core State Standards initiated by the district and the professional learning they received?

2. How do elementary teachers describe their decision making and changes in instruction based on the professional learning they received when implementing Common Core State Standards?

3. What successes and challenges have elementary teachers experienced in using the Common Core State Standards in their instructional delivery?

Significance of this Study

A review of the research shows a lack of research on teachers’ perceptions about implementing the CCSS and how these perceptions influence their instructional decision making (Hall et al., 2015; Joong & Ryan, 2013). This study adds to the literature by analyzing elementary teachers’ perceptions of the implementation of the CCSS and its effects on their instructional decision making to improve student learning to be college and career ready. In
addition, this study added to the literature on how teachers utilize PL during an educational reform. Most of the research focuses on PL strategies that are most effective, not necessarily on how teachers use what is learned in their classrooms and not during an educational reform, such as the CCSS.

Teachers will benefit from the findings of this study because they will gain a deeper understanding of how PL impacts the decisions they make in the classroom regarding the CCSS. Teachers will also benefit from hearing how other teachers have adapted to the educational reform. Since a majority of the United States teachers have been impacted by this educational reform, it is imperative for teachers to understand how and why individuals change their practice. By understanding change and the process of change, teachers can support each other while reaching the goal of improving instruction. It will also benefit elementary principals and instructional support coaches (ISC) as they plan PL around best practices in teaching geared to student learning. Teacher leaders, such as principals and ISCs, can work to develop their capacity to facilitate PL focused on teaching and learning of any new reform. As new reforms and educational initiatives present themselves, understanding how to use resources and tools to support effective PL will benefit teachers for current and future reforms.

Framework

Fullan’s change theory was used as one of the frameworks in this study. Fullan’s view of change is a systems approach, mainly focusing on the idea that the success of any change initiative is dependent on the entire system of change agents (teachers, parents, students, administrators, etc.). A change agent is defined as someone who influences innovations in a positive direction (Rogers, 1996). According to Fullan (2007), change occurs in three phases
over time (Fullan, 2007). These three phases are initiation, implementation, and sustainability. Although the goal of any change is sustainability, the change will not occur if the change has not been successfully initiated or fully implemented (Fullan, 2007). Each phase depends on the prior phase’s success.

Each phase has certain actions that need to take place in order for the next phase to be successful. In the initiation phase, Fullan includes choosing a reform initiative and understanding the “forces that drive” that change within schools (Bourke & McGee, 2012). This phase also includes capturing the trust of change agents involved in the reform. The implementation phase is based on the organization of the plan to make sure that the specifics of the plan are fulfilled during the change initiative (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). The sustainability phase is what takes place to ensure the initiative continues to meet the expectations set forth in the reform (Hargreaves, 2009; Holmes, Clement, & Albright, 2013).

Educational change refers to national-level attempts to reform the educational system. Fullan (2006) refers to reform as something that unfolds, but “don’t expect reforms to unfold as intended” (p. 22). Even though Fullan explains the unfolding process does not always happen in the way it was intended, he theorizes that the phases of the reform present a target to work towards a change occurring. Fullan’s change theory focuses on what policies are enacted to initiate the reform, what strategies are needed to implement the reform, and what the transformation will look like when the reform is sustained (Fullan, 2007). Taking this into account, Fullan’s change theory was used to examine the process of the CCSS implementation in one suburban school district.

Along with change theory, John Hattie’s 10 mindframes also served as one of the frameworks for this study. Hattie argues that when teachers adopt 10 thinking processes, the
impact on student learning is considerable, regardless of the reform or initiative leading the educational system (Hattie, 2008). The 10 mindframes are founded on the principle that teachers are evaluators, change agents, learning experts, and seekers of feedback who are constantly engaged with dialogue and challenge. Hattie (2018) contends that what teachers think is more important than what teachers know and do.

An essential piece of teaching and learning has to do with the teacher’s mindframe (i.e., the teacher’s view of himself or herself as a teacher). Hattie (2008) espouses that successful teachers are able to see what is working and what is not working in their classrooms and then use that evidence to inform their next steps to move students from where they are to where they need to be. Having the right frame of mind and the appropriate instructional decision-making ability allows teachers to increase students’ abilities in achieving a positive learning outcome (Hattie, 2008). Together, these frameworks define what teachers should know and be able to do, ranging from assessment to relationships in the classroom (Table 1).

Hattie (2008) reported that “educating students to be good learners alone may not be sufficient to help them become strong out-of-school learners” (p. 18). With federally mandated and state-supported initiatives for raising standards and measuring student achievement, allocating schools to change what and how they teach ensures students are learning and achieving (Bee Bee, 2008; Hattie, 2008). The instructional implications set forth in the CCSS are an increase in rigor, relevance, and coherence (Mathis, 2010). These instructional implications match Hattie’s mindframes for teaching regarding setting high expectations for teachers’ instructional success, thus making teachers’ instruction fundamental concerning what and how students learn. The importance of the teachers’ role in understanding what to instruct and how to
instruct become critical when looking at the standards because the CCSS do not explain how to teach (Common Core State Standards, 2011).

Table 1

Hattie’s 10 Mindframes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mindframe 1</th>
<th>I am an evaluator of my impact on student learning</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mindframe 2</td>
<td>I see assessments as informing my impact and next steps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindframe 3</td>
<td>I collaborate with my peers and my students about my conceptions of progress and my impact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindframe 4</td>
<td>I am a change agent and believe all students can improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindframe 5</td>
<td>I strive for challenge and not merely “doing my best”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindframe 6</td>
<td>I give and help students understand feedback and I interpret and act on the feedback given to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindframe 7</td>
<td>I engage as much in dialogue as monologue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindframe 8</td>
<td>I explicitly inform students what successful impact looks like from the onset</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindframe 9</td>
<td>I build relationships and trust so that learning can occur in a place where it is safe to make mistakes and learn from others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mindframe 10</td>
<td>I focus on learning and the language of learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another important component to the CCSS is intentional planning. Since the CCSS do not answer the questions, stakeholders have to determine how much instructional time should be invested in mastery of a standard, what strategies will be effective in teaching this standard, what the progression of learning should look like or how the instruction relates to previous standards, so it becomes a challenge to plan effective lessons. The standards position teachers to re-emphasize evidence-based practices in the classroom and make the necessary shifts in
mindframes as described by Hattie (2012). These evidence-based practices refer to examples such as direct instruction, formative evaluation, feedback, and reciprocal teaching that guides teaching (Hattie, 2009). For students to be independent with the skills addressed in the CCSS, teachers need a deeper understanding of the discourse surrounding curriculum, instruction, and student learning (Bee Bee, 2008). The CCSS stress the need for coherent instruction and a systematic increase in skills:

By reading texts in history/social studies, science, and other disciplines, students build a foundation of knowledge in these fields that will also give them the background to be better readers in all content areas, thus building on skills. Students can only gain this foundation when the curriculum is intentionally and coherently structured to develop rich content knowledge within and across grades. (Common Core State Standards, 2011)

A more detailed explanation of these frameworks appears in Chapter 2.

Definitions

Terms used in this study are defined as follows:

**Elementary teacher:** A certified educator with a bachelor’s degree or Type 03 certificate in education who completed a general education program that prepares each to teach all core subjects, particularly math, science, social studies, reading and language arts in a self-contained general education in kindergarten through Grade 9 (ISBE, 2019).

**Instructional Decision Making:** A systematic process of using student achievement and other data to guide instructional decisions. These decisions include, but are not limited to, how to adapt lessons or assignments in response to students’ needs, alter classroom goals or objectives, and modify student-grouping arrangements (Hamilton, Halverson, Jackson, Mandinach, & Supovitz, 2009).
Professional learning: An integral part of school and local educational agency strategies for providing educators (including teachers, principals, other school leaders, specialized instructional support personnel, paraprofessionals, and, as applicable, early childhood educators) with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed in a well-rounded education and to meet the challenging state academic standards, which are sustained (not stand-alone, one-day, or short-term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job embedded, data driven, and classroom focused (Learning Forward, 2015).

Reform: To make changes in something, typically a social, political, or economic institution or practice to improve it (Fullan, Bertani, & Quinn, 2004).

Methodology

This study used a phenomenological qualitative approach. Using critical case sampling methods, the participants were third-and fifth-grade teachers who had been teaching a minimum of 10 years in the same suburban elementary community unit school district. The study used structured interviews, focus groups, and artifacts/records pertaining to planning and implementing the CCSS as well as bi-weekly reflections. Constant comparison allowed teachers’ responses to the open-ended questions in the interviews and focus groups regarding instructional decisions and CCSS to be analyzed (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The method of constant comparison required reading the transcribed responses multiple times to become acutely familiar with them. Each meaningful word, phrase, or sentence was classified into a theme (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These themes then became the premise for horizontalizing data into significant statements (Creswell, 2007; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Interpretive comparison (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008) focused on what was meant by the
responses as well as what was inferred or implied. Coding of the bi-weekly reflections used the same method as the interview transcripts, specifically looking at key words and phrases that matched the themes in the interviews. Lastly, content analysis (Berelson, 1952) as part of the artifact analysis looked for themes that connected with the above data collection methods.

After completing data analysis, I created a matrix to match key quotes and phrases to establish themes using the interview, focus group, and bi-weekly reflection data. If these teachers mentioned a specific artifact in one of the interviews or in a focus group, it was noted in the matrix and requested from the teacher. The artifacts were then matched to the themes that complemented them to add more support to the theme.

Conclusion

Five chapters frame this paper. The first chapter provides an overview of the study, including the problem, purpose, research questions, significance of the study, and framework. Chapter 2 includes a detailed review of the literature about past educational reforms, change theory, and mindframes. Chapter 3 describes the methods used to conduct the study. Chapter 4 unpacks the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 contains a detailed discussion about the findings, implications for teachers and policymakers, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This literature review examines the history of change initiatives and the impact reforms have had on teachers’ perspectives related to student learning. In particular, this chapter contains the following sections: the history of educational reform in the United States, the CCSS reform movement, Hattie’s mindframes, and the conceptual framework for the proposed study. Putting change theory, education reforms, and teacher mindframes together is at the heart of why change is a necessity in education.

History of Education Reform in the United States

A number of historians have written about reform in American education (Lieberman, 2005; Ravitch, 1998; Tyack, 1974). To understand the changing priorities of education it is important to consider the events in history that spurred the educational changes in our nation. On October 4, 1957, Sputnik I was launched and started a myriad of educational reforms that have continued and intensified with each decade (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). For example, with the launching of Sputnik I, Washington passed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958, resulting in more than a billion dollars being invested in the teaching of science and math (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). With NDEA, a new educational trend of federal control emerged that has continued for over 50 years.
The reform movement continued when President Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) in 1965 as part of his War on Poverty initiative. He wanted to focus on a social change initiative with the goal of eliminating poverty through education reform (Moynihan, 1969). As such, a major change initiative that emerged from the ESEA was the creation of Title I, which gave support to school districts that needed resources to help close the achievement gap for low-income and minority populations. Even though federal control continued to close the achievement gap with ESEA, the intended impact of this reform did not have the lasting effects that President Johnson intended (Hopkins & Stern, 1996).

As the federal government initiatives were being enacted in public schools, the RAND Corporation began studying those federal programs (Berman & McLaughlin, 1974) to identify which reforms were sustaining the intended changes. For 15 years (1960-1975), the RAND Corporation studied the implementation of educational change initiatives that promised to increase the achievement of all students. Those programs included ESEA’s Titles III (supports for local innovation projects in schools) and VII (district bilingual efforts), the Vocational Education Act, and the Right-to-Read program to eliminate illiteracy (McLaughlin, 1990). The RAND studies found the implementation of those programs did not show statistically significant change in student achievement. Instead, the reforms were based on “relatively unexamined assumptions about change in public schools and the role of government in affecting this change” (McLaughlin, 1990, p. 11). Even with these findings, the federal education system continued its initiatives to impart change on the education system and student learning.

In response to the RAND Corporation’s findings, President Jimmy Carter proposed a cabinet-level Department of Education (Kruse & Louis, 2009). Following this proposal, Congress established the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) in 1980. The USDOE faced
the task of generating accountability for education programs and increasing effectiveness. President Carter felt that education could not be left to chance and wanted more control of federal education dollars to improve equity in funding across states. He also proposed that the government needed accountability measures for reforms being implemented. However, even with the creation of the USDOE to help streamline educational change, the achievement of high school students fell from 1964-1969 and 1976-81 when test scores were compared with the same course curriculum using the SAT assessment. It was also found that when choice was built in for students to choose their course work, 25% of the credits earned by high school students were in physical and health education instead of subjects considered to be from higher academic areas. For example, students were not choosing chemistry in science, trigonometry in math, or creative writing in English.

Following the news that assessment scores were falling, *A Nation at Risk* was published (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) by President Reagan and his administration. The report described how America’s educational system was failing students. The report recommended that schools should become more rigorous and should adopt new standards. *A Nation at Risk* spurred an educational discussion that focused on standards for both curriculum and achievement. The report also created a desire to reform education in the United States to bring greater economic and national security (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). As a result, the report generated educational reform at the state level and a plethora of education laws and regulations.

For example, according to Fullan (2007), *A Nation at Risk* added significant measures in terms of standards and accountability to reforms that were not grounded in research. The educational system was saturated with innovative ideas. “There was actually great pressure and
incentives to becoming innovative, and this resulted in many schools adopting reforms for which they did not have the capacity to put into practice” (Fullan, 2009, p. 103). That is, on the surface, schools adopted innovations based on language and structures the reform intended but not those in actual practice. Subsequently, starting in the 1990s, reforms were legislated to counteract the effects of *A Nation at Risk*, but Fullan (2009) emphasized that there was no national strategy, no explicit use of change theory, and, aside from a few successful school districts, there was no national progress.

Efforts by the U.S. government have focused on large-scale education reform, resulting in very little overall impact. The American Institutes for Research (AIR) reviewed 24 whole-school reform models. Only 3 of the 24 models were shown to have positive effects on student achievement. Although the AIR found Direct Instruction, High Schools That Work, and Success for All reforms to be successful in 1999, they were not sustained. Datnow and Stringfield (2000) referred to this as the longevity of reform, and in 2002, Datnow and her collaborators conducted a longitudinal study of 13 schools and found that only 4 of the 13 were still using the reforms after six years. In response to reforms of the past not being sustainable, a new educational reform was proposed in 1994 that reduced the federal role in education by providing specific language that granted states and local communities the power of create educational policy over specific federal mandates (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000).

Goals 2000: Educate America Act, signed into law in 1994 by President Clinton, was the start of standards-based reform. The ideals of this Act were to ensure student success by 2000 by providing resources to states that ensured all students reach their full potential. This was in reaction to the results from *A Nation at Risk*, 10 years prior and to No Child Left Behind that mandated measurable improvement in student achievement across the nation. Goals 2000
attempted to support state-driven systemic education reform through which the states would be held accountable for improvements in student performance in conjunction with meeting the national goals dictated by the reform. Many states and districts used their Goals 2000 monies to further their systemic reform plans and align their standards with state assessments in hopes of creating coherence in educational practice. While little evidence is available on student performance to indicate whether this focus improved student learning (Spring 2008), Goals 2000 sparked the development of content and performance standards in each grade and in each subject area. However, with new administration and the American public still concerned about improving education in the United States, more federal reforms followed (McNeal & Christy, 2001).

Thus, in 2002, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law and further removed state control over education change initiatives. NCLB’s purpose was to narrow the achievement gap through four main ideas: accountability for results, implementing research-based practices, school choice, and increased local control (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). NCLB’s intent was similar to many of the former change initiatives intended to increase student achievement and accountability for districts and schools that received federal funds (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003). However, NCLB elevated state accountability by tying outcomes to school funding sources. With the threat of school closures and loss of jobs, “this federal mandate limited the traditional framework of local control under states’ rights guidelines because refusing NCLB meant refusing all aspects of the federal educational funding on which schools and states had come to rely” (Elmore, 2005, p. 8). The focus was placed on collection of data that could be used to inform decisions regarding the achievement of all students (Marzano, 2003). Unlike any change initiative of the past, NCLB required individual schools within a school
district to sort and rank students’ achievement test scores. This resulted in educators being held accountable not only at a district level but also at the federal level to make sure all students were succeeding, or federal money would be allocated to other schools making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP is a measurement used to evaluate schools based on their state standardized test results in reading, mathematics, and language arts. This increased pressure to dramatically improve student achievement scores created unforeseen stress on administrators and educators alike (Sahlberg, 2011).

Although federal reforms had been trying to make school districts more accountable for the success of all students since Sputnik I, NCLB was the first change initiative that truly made individual schools accountable for each child’s success (Dee & Jacob, 2011). If within five years of no significant changes occurring in schools across the nation and without successful student attainment of standards, teachers and administrators were out of a job. This then prompted the government to gain total control over the school (Jorgensen & Hoffman, 2003; Reeves, 2009).

On a positive note, this reform shifted teachers’ mindsets about teaching and student success as well as instructional decisions made only to improve test scores and to accommodate policies mandated by NCLB (Spohn, 2008). Eventually, it led to the creation and adoption of the CCSS as a set of national, common, rigorous standards to help eliminate the inequity in academic performance among K-12 students across the United States (Common Core State Standards, 2015). Based on past reforms, Hattie (2012) contends that the reform does not improve education. Teachers do.

**Common Core State Standards Reform**

In 2010, CCSS were adopted for English language arts and mathematics in 46 of the 50
states in the United States, with three states (Indiana, South Carolina, and Oklahoma) repealing the standards since adoption. These states felt that modifications needed to be made to the standards. Several states adopted the CCSS in 2010 with the intent that teachers would fully implement the new standards during the 2013-2014 school year and replace state assessments with CCSS-aligned assessments by 2014-2015. This change initiative was a monumental shift from individual state standards and assessments (Common Core State Standards, 2015). Additionally, states that signed on to implement CCSS were eligible for Race to the Top funds offered by the U. S. Department of Education, with expectations of collecting and reporting on student data from kindergarten through 12th grade to support instructional decision making and utilize teacher expertise, moving away from the NCLB focus (Bomer & Maloch, 2011).

With the adoption of the CCSS, the new standards and rigor of the K-12 curriculum have created a dramatic change with regard to the reformers’ vision for improving the education system. For example, Bomer and Maloch (2011) found that educators are aware that the CCSS have dramatically changed what they are required to teach and what students must be able to do by the end of each academic year. In response, educators have had to develop new and effective means to share and develop effective instruction as well as strategies for best practice (Cogan, Schmidt, & Houang, 2013). How teachers implement the standards in the classroom is directly related to their conceptual understanding of the standards themselves and how to utilize them effectively during instruction (Cogan, Schmidt, & Houang, 2013).

**Criticisms of the CCSS**

The CCSS include two sets of academic curriculum standards that all students are
expected to learn, kindergarten through high school; however, the CCSS does not provide specific guidelines on how they are supposed to be taught. In contrast to past reforms, the goal was not to close the achievement gap or increase higher graduation rates like the past reforms. Instead the CCSS were created with new modern-day college and career readiness expectations as the focus (Carroll, 2015).

With the change in focus for CCSS from previous reforms, Jimenez and Sargard (2017) found that the most effective path for implementing the CCSS was thorough understanding the standards, having an available resource bank, and seeking strong teacher participation. In particular, teacher participation referred to being involved in decisions related to reform implementation as well as more control over classroom implementation to increase buy-in. In comparison, teachers surveyed by Cogan et al. (2013) stated they supported the CCSS, but they also shared some frustration in getting to all of the standards required of them in their daily instruction. In Cheng’s (2012) research, teachers felt that the CCSS allowed them to focus on content in a timely manner, but it did require effective training for proper implementation in that the standards did not detail exactly how the goals must be met. With this, the CCSS standards are not always understood by teachers (Cogan et al., 2013). Under past reforms teachers were often required to follow pacing guides and teaching scripts and were denied flexibility in student differentiation (Van Roekel, 2010). However, under CCSS, teachers have flexibility and room to apply new understanding of teaching and learning with their students. Still teachers’ lack of understanding of the standards (Cogan et al., 2013) and the standards’ open interpretation of the fundamental tasks that students must be able to accomplish by the end of each grade level create a disconnect guided by state and district assessment. This disconnect between the standards and
teachers applying that learning to their instructional decisions creates an area of ambiguity in the
classroom.

Although some experienced teachers may comprehend the CCSS, they seem to be
lacking in the purpose and implementation of standards within curriculum lesson planning and
practice (Santoro, 2011; Van Roekel, 2010). Teachers’ perceive their role in education as being
one of implementing the curriculum and planning or delivering lessons as a key determinant of
the standards. Teachers must be invested in the PL being offered. Teachers must receive support
in the standards and effective teaching strategies (Conley, 2011) to understand, apply, and
incorporate the standards into their instruction. This point is supported by Ash (2011), who
reported a weakness concerning the CCSS, as there are limited opportunities for educators to
share resources and collaborate. As such, PL opportunities should help teachers better understand
instructional decision making in order to implement the CCSS effectively (Carroll, 2015), as all
students need to achieve at high levels. In fact, achievement in students is tied to teacher
effectiveness and the ways in which teachers deliver instruction (Covay Minor, Desimone,
Caines Lee, & Hochberg, 2016; Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004). One-day PL programs
do not accommodate the rigorous changes needed to meet CCSS expectations (Darling-
Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Thus, it is imperative for teachers to be provided
opportunities to explore and develop their mindframes to balance the rigorous standards and the
related instructional decisions needed to increase student achievement.

Professional Learning Process for Common Core State Standards

While substantial planning has occurred for the CCSS, the transition to the CCSS
challenges elementary, middle, and high schools most directly in terms of implementation. In
placing every student on a pathway to college and career readiness, schools are embarking on a journey into uncharted waters that will challenge educators’ willingness to learn and their resolve to persist in the face of adversity. For the CCSS to be implemented effectively, all stakeholders in elementary buildings (principals, teachers, and other educators) must have adequate support and guidance. As Gail Connelly (2017), executive director of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), stated:

Principals and teachers must have access to the essential professional learning opportunities they need to fully implement the Common Core, to transition to rigorous standards that strengthen teaching and learning, and to develop effective strategies that engage families and communities in schools. (p. 8)

This PL means support for planning, capacity building, and implementation. Elementary teachers need to be provided the resources needed to teach to the CCSS as well as be provided PL so they can have access to the needed curricula and have a chance to provide input into assessment protocols and procedures. The understanding from and leadership of school leaders are essential to the success of the CCSS. Thus, the success of such change requires the thoughtful attention of school leaders to create a sense of urgency around implementation and provide teachers with a deep understanding of the standards and their role during implementation.

Elementary teachers set a critical foundation in reading, writing, listening, and speaking for later student learning and success. Because of this, with the CCSS there is a focus on deeper levels of student understanding and more academic rigor during a child’s early years in school. PL should lead teachers through a process of examining their curricula and instruction and making adjustments so students achieve at higher levels and are better prepared for middle and high school. For teachers to learn new ways of teaching, the PL will take months and years of
deliberate learning and practice to master. PL stakeholders will need both short-and long-term plans based on the assessed needs of students as well as the PL needs of their teachers.

Achieve the Core (2013) states that improving the quality of teaching methods will be the foundation for increased student performance when implementing the CCSS. Studies show that teachers often lack capacity in the areas deemed most critical to the CCSS (Accountability Works, 2012; Burks et al, 2015; Mathis, 2010). Typically, teachers are strong in organization and classroom management and lack higher order questioning skills and skills for engaging students. Implementation of the CCSS will require a PL centered on building the capacity of teachers in regard to instructional practices and systems within a relatively brief period of time. The implementation of the CCSS mean that teamwork, both within the school and among schools, must become non-negotiable. The changes brought about by the CCSS are of such a magnitude that stakeholders must build the collective capacity of the entire staff through mutually agreed-upon and defined schoolwide instructional practices. Stakeholders need to believe in the power of collaboration and collective action. PL must work to build collaborative communities of learners.

Beyond knowing about the standards, teachers need to understand how schools must change to successfully implement the CCSS. Stakeholders need a practical understanding of the schoolwide changes made necessary by the CCSS and how to lead those changes to create a culture of success in schools. Such change does not happen by itself in schools. It results from changes in attitudes encouraged by new information, reflection, and changes in practice. To lead implementation of the CCSS, stakeholders will need to focus on building teacher capacity and must remind themselves that these changes are profound and will be stressful and, in some cases, intimidating to many teachers. Just as the culture of the classroom is the sum of the teachers’
attitudes and expectations, the school culture is a result of the staff’s collective thoughts, beliefs, expectations and conversations that lead directly to both individual and group behaviors. If these new ways of interacting and teaching are practiced consistently over time, they will turn into new habits and new patterns of behavior.

The following section defines 10 qualities effective teachers should possess as they engage in instructional delivery with students. Hattie’s 10 mindframes also serve as one of the frameworks for this research study.

Hattie’s Mindframes

Based on Hattie’s (2012) research, visible learning and teaching occurs when teachers see learning through the eyes of students and help them become their own teachers. His thinking about empowering students aligns with the shift to the CCSS by increasing student interest and inquiry though determining what they want to learn. Along with knowing the impact a teacher has on the learning of his or her students, a teacher’s beliefs also influence student achievement (Covay Minor et al., 2016; Dee & Jacob, 2011). According to Hattie (2012), what teachers know and do in the classroom is less important than what teachers think. He argues that the instructional decisions teachers make on a daily basis affect student achievement and success more than knowledge about curriculum and planning (Gabriel, Day, & Allington, 2011). This knowledge is supported by a growing body of literature showing that traditional educational initiatives have little impact on test scores, but teacher effort and teacher pedagogy do (Bruns et al., 2014; Evans & Popova, 2015; Glewwe & Muralidharan, 2015).

through these ways of thinking, the impact teachers can have on their students’ learning is more important than the reform or initiative leading the educational system at the time (Zegarac, 2013). Identified below are Hattie’s (2009) 10 mindframes for teachers to work toward obtaining the most effective teaching and student achievement outcomes:

1. I am an evaluator of my impact on student learning
2. I see assessments as informing my impact and next steps
3. I collaborate with my peers and my students about my conceptions of progress and my impact
4. I am a change agent and believe all students can improve
5. I strive for challenge and not merely “doing my best
6. I give and help students understand feedback and I interpret and act on the feedback given to me
7. I engage as much in dialogue as monologue
8. I explicitly inform students what successful impact looks like from the onset
9. I build relationships and trust so that learning can occur in a place where it is safe to make mistakes and learn from others
10. I focus on learning and the language of learning (p. 159)

Hattie’s (2009) message is that teachers must “know thy impact” (p. 18). That is, through the 10 identified mindframes, Hattie (2012) examines the principles of visible learning and visible teaching in the classroom. Visible learning occurs when the learning is “explicit and transparent, when it is appropriately challenging, and when the teacher and the student both seek to ascertain whether and to what degree the challenging goal is attained” (pp. 17-18). Visible teaching occurs when it is clear what teachers are teaching and what students are learning (Hattie, 2012). Each mindframe is defined below as well as an elementary teaching example to operationalize each mindframe.

**Mindframe 1: I am an evaluator of my impact on student learning**

This mindframe suggests that this is where the passion for teaching comes through. Teachers need to set up a caring and respectful environment for students, and for this to happen,
teachers need to model this same behavior and listen, really listen, to what their students are saying. Hattie’s (2009) position is that teachers are taught to plan lessons and not to focus on what impact the lesson is having on their students. A single term emerged that encompasses activities that strive to reposition students in educational research and reform: “student voice,” as illustrated by a quote from a fifth-grade student, “Well, most teachers say, ‘If you have any ideas raise your hand,’ but they don’t really care what you have to say because they know what they are going to teach us” (Cook-Sather, 2006, 369). Hattie proposes a shift in Mindframe 1 for teachers to engage in listening to their students’ needs and interests.

**Mindframe 2: I see assessment as informing my impact and next steps**

The teacher’s role is to effect change and in doing so increase student learning. Teachers are currently acting as facilitators of learning in the classroom, and the need to focus on the students’ backgrounds and what each student brings to the classroom will take a great deal of commitment from teachers. But through this focus, relationships and the purpose of education will be achieved (Zegarac, 2013). Tyler (1939) posits Hattie’s Mindframe 2 by connecting it to the way the learning experiences are organized in a classroom. The lessons should focus on students’ needs first and foremost and then content and standards. Teachers need to focus on where their students are instead of what lessons they need to get through that day. The teacher’s role is to change students from what they are to what they want them to be and what we want them to know and understand (Hattie, 2012).

To operationalize Mindframe 2 in the elementary setting, brainstorming exemplifies this shift in thinking for teachers. Since brainstorming is a group activity, it is an opportunity for students to participate without pressure. It is important to stress that it is okay to say whatever
comes to mind and that you want ideas from everyone, good or bad. As a class activity, students and teachers should organize and sort the ideas into actionable items. Working together in this way is a good reminder that we are smarter when we all contribute and collaborate (Hsiao & Yang, 2010).

Mindframe 3: I collaborate with my peers and my students about my conceptions of progress and my impact

The main task of the education system is to find out what students do not know and help them learn it (Hattie, 2012); however, only 50% of what is taught in school is actually what students do not already know. Therefore, the purpose of this mindframe is to build relational support in the classroom by making sure students can openly say that they do not understand or that they have already learned a skill. Teachers strive to establish partnerships with parents to support student learning. Strong communication is fundamental to this partnership and in building a sense of community between home and school. Research suggests that “asking for help, admitting error, and seeking feedback exemplifies the kind of behaviors that pose a threat to face...this then limits students’ willingness to engage in problem-solving activities” (Edmondson, 1999, p. 234), which hampers learning and positive relationship building. When parents understand the language of learning, they are better able to support their children in academic areas, engagement in school, and support of teacher expectations (Hattie, 2012). Hence, when teachers, students, and parents understand the language of learning, teachers are more apt to have a mindframe in which they see the importance of supporting students at their current academic level and having the skills to communicate this.

An elementary example of the language of learning involves a shared communication of what students are learning and how parents can support this learning at home. Teachers may
share specific websites that support a specific skill or strategy, or teachers may send
weekly/monthly letters home to parents about learning goals and upcoming events. This
communication among students, teachers, and parents is what makes Mindframe 3 extremely
powerful in creating learning environments (Kyriakides, Christoforou, & Charalambous, 2013).

Mindframe 4: I am a change agent and believe that students can improve

In regard to teachers being change agents, Hattie and Zierer (2018) reported that for
successful learning to occur in the classroom, there are several factors that need to be in place,
including classroom management, the perspective of the teacher on learning for all students, and
the belief that change is possible. Like all of Hattie’s mindframes, it is not what the teacher does
but how she thinks that is most important in impacting student growth; therefore, as the task of
teaching becomes increasingly more complex, teachers need to be change agents and embrace
the growth in words and actions in the classroom. Being a change agent requires a constant
examination of data to make sure that the instruction is achieved, and since every teacher’s
perceptions are not always the same as others, collaboration with other teachers is essential.

An elementary classroom example of “I am a change agent and believe that all students
can learn” is a professional learning community (PLC) meeting where students are the center of
the work. Teachers strive to collaborate with other professionals based on student data and
strategies to move the students forward. This forward thinking relates to classroom management,
relationship building, or specific learning targets and goals. When teachers aspire to be change
agents, they know that their teaching impacts students, and they strive to continuously
collaborate to apply successful methods of teaching.
Mindframe 5: I strive for challenge and not merely “doing your best”

Giving feedback does not on its own improve student learning. In fact, the main purpose of feedback is to decrease inconsistencies among students’ understanding, performance, and specific goals (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Likewise, the feedback has to be effective (Hattie, 2012). Hattie and Timperley (2007) found:

Effective feedback must answer three questions asked by a teacher and/or a student: Where am I going? (What are the goals?), How am I going? (What progress is being made toward the goal?), and Where to next? (What activities need to be undertaken to make better progress?). (p. 86)

However, some types of feedback are more effective than other types. When students receive verbal, video, audio, or computer-assisted instructional feedback in the form of reinforcements related to achieving a specific goal, learners were more likely to reach their intended academic goal. This mindframe is all about pushing students to meet their full potential through providing students with enough challenge to make them think beyond their potential. Like teachers, Hattie suggests that students have to think to be able to learn; thus, teachers have to know what students know and what they need to know.

The challenge to this notion in the elementary classroom is the significant number of individual differences surrounding the challenge of learning. What may be easy for one student may be a challenge for another. Therefore, learning intentions and success indicators are crucial in the classroom to support students in understanding the purpose of the challenge that will lead to success in learning. An example of a learning intention may be, “Today I will learn specific
transition words and phrases to add to my literary essay so that I can write an organized and coherent essay. I know that I have got it when I can identify the transition words in my own writing and in others’ writing to make the writing clear and coherent.” This takes a considerable amount of time and energy and relates back to the previous Mindframes. Teachers need to know their students and their content and balance the two with the correct form of feedback to help students be successful.

**Mindframe 6: I give and help students understand feedback and I interpret and act on the feedback given to me**

Feedback is part of Hattie’s (2009) research and is an essential part of effective learning. It helps students understand the subject being studied and gives them clear guidance on how to improve their learning. This mindframe has two parts: one focused on the assessment performed by the student and the other focused on evaluation of the teacher on the impact instruction is having on the students. When looking at assessments that students take to measure their learning, students have shown that they are very good at determining how well they did (Hattie, 2009). Students learn what they can and cannot do, but the error occurs when students continue to perform at this level and do not push themselves to go beyond. Although assessment is a fundamental piece of education and a means for holding teachers accountable for their instruction and students learning the content, assessments are not often viewed this way. This shift to see assessment as impact on student learning and not as another task to accomplish could be a key mindset for educators.

Once again, we can look to Tyler’s (1939) principles as we look through the assessment lens. He interprets assessment as the students’ independent ability to show that they have
achieved the objective of the lesson. Through assessment, teachers are given the essential feedback they need to determine what students have learned and, more importantly, where to go next. Mindframe 6 is essential for progressing students’ achievement to new levels.

An elementary example of this mindframe is centered on assessment as feedback for teachers in regard to looking at and interpreting the results. This can be done through a teacher’s analysis of class reading assessments. By analyzing what was taught well and what was not, who was taught well and who was not, as well as an examination of the gap and strengths in the students’ work, teachers can reflect on how to develop a common conception of progress with the students and with their teaching team members.

**Mindframe 7: I engage as much in dialogue as monologue**

Instead of teachers being the sage on the stage and trying to be the imparter of knowledge to their students, teachers need to listen to students’ voices and to students’ questions, ideas, struggles, strategies for learning, and successes to inform instructional decisions. The use of one-way communication is often the case in teacher/student interactions (Nicol, 2010), and the result is a great deal of dissatisfaction with feedback by students and teachers. This has been evidenced in a number of surveys, research studies, and reports (Boud, 2000; Nicol, 2010).

Hattie (2012) asserts that one way to combat this interaction is to replace monologue with dialogue. It is common that monologue is spoken by the teacher and then the students are asked to validate their learning. The challenge is that dialogue does not just happen in the classroom without strategic planning and relationship building to understand the what and why of dialogue. Hattie (2012) reiterates this in his extensive research by explaining that when the teacher is talking and is the leader of all conversations in the classroom, it demonstrates to students that the

teacher is the owner of the content. However, Hattie contends there is a major incentive to listening to students’ questions, ideas, struggles or successes, strategies for learning, or interactions with peers. Hence, this change allows for more effective classroom discussion and student ownership.

For example, dialogue is a much-needed attribute for providing growth on an elementary writing assignment. To help clarify ideas that students do not understand and give corrective feedback, teachers must spend a substantial amount of time constructing feedback comments on assignments. This feedback is for naught if the students do not act on the feedback provided. Thus, it is imperative for teachers to provide oral feedback to students in a one-on-one dialogue writing conference or as a classroom discussion so students understand where they are and what needs to be improved. This contributes to the overall growth of student ownership and classroom community.

Mindframe 8: I explicitly inform students what successful impact looks like from the onset

Successful learning does not only happen when the learning is clear, but also in the way that the learning outcomes are presented (Hattie, 2018). Hattie posits that it is not whether the answer is right or wrong, but whether the process of learning has occurred and the students have obtained or are moving toward an understanding of the learning outcome. Thus, being explicit in the ways that one informs students about what successful impact looks like from the onset is truly about providing strong work samples and supporting the students along the path of learning. Several studies support the use of strong samples to support students’ learning, including Zhu and Simon (1987) and Paas, Van Merrienboer, and Adam (1994). Both studies
found that the cognitive demand was lower, letting students focus on the skills and transfer of knowledge, when the appropriate success criteria were set for the outcomes of the lesson.

The learning process and the path to success criteria can be different for each student; however, the learning objectives and success criteria are the same. Students must understand what impact they have on their learning through the direct connection to the success criteria for a lesson. In the elementary classroom, when teachers make clear to the learners what they should learn, why and what for, the goal for learning becomes visible. When a teacher creates success criteria that are visible to the students, they are more apt to understand what successful learning looks like. This can be seen in sample writing pieces for students or when teachers model a piece of the writing process with students. This sample becomes a mentor text for students to model their writing after, thus supporting students’ understanding of what is expected.

**Mindframe 9: I build relationships and trust so that learning can occur in a place where it is safe to make mistakes and learn from others**

Students have to be part of an environment set up by the teacher that allows mistakes to become learning opportunities, and teachers must view their role as a facilitator of developing positive relationships with each and every student. Palmer (2007) emphasizes the heart of a teacher as being the source of good teaching. The heart of a teacher refers to the connections made by teachers with their students. Teachers with this mindframe build positive relationships with students, have high expectations for themselves and their students, and establish a classroom environment that is respectful, caring, trusting, and conducive to student learning. This can be done by having students help in creating the rules and consequences in the classroom as well as building classroom climate activities to increase the community atmosphere. A good
Deal of literature provides evidence that strong relationships between students and their teachers are essential to the development of all students in the school (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Hamre & Pianta, 2006). This can be done by having students help create the rules and consequences in the elementary classroom as well as building in classroom climate activities to increase community atmosphere. Students need to know that making mistakes is okay, and if they do not understand something, they need to ask questions. Asking questions and being an informed member of the classroom are critical for this mindframe to be successful in supporting student learning.

**Mindframe 10: I focus on learning and the language of learning**

When teachers are learning something new, they bring with them prior knowledge, skills, and connections from previous experiences. Hattie (2012) believes that for teachers to be successful, they need to be willing to be active, self-directed learners. Learning is not something that can be done to you. It is an interactive process that involves give and take. Teachers need to focus on what is important in teaching and what drives the learning. However, common language around learning is the crucial next step. Schools that focus on learner dispositions and teach students how and when to use the dispositions can help change the mindset of school stakeholders (Dewitt, 2015).

An elementary example of this mindframe in action is making mistakes and learning from them. Hattie (2018) stresses the importance of mistakes as a learning opportunity and a way to make learning visible. This can be seen in any assessment or activity given by the teacher. When learners are given an independent task, teachers need to make sure that the level of challenge is not too high or too low for the students. If a mistake is made by a student, it is the teacher’s responsibility to assess the confidence of the learner and instruct based on prior
knowledge of the student and their skills. Since 50% of the learning material that students are presented with is already known, it becomes the responsibility of the teacher to gauge the mistake as a skill deficit or a natural mistake in the learning process. Either way, monitoring the students’ motivation and conscientiousness can be especially helpful in focusing on the learning that is occurring for each student.

Application of Hattie’s Mindframes to Current Research

Each mindframe is essential, and each mindframe brings the realization of all students reaching the expectations that the reform intended (DeYoung, 2015; Hattie, 2012). DeYoung (2015) found in her study that teacher perceptions on what effective teaching looks like aligned to 8 out of 10 of Hattie’s mindframes. These included high expectations of students (Mindframe 8), relationships with students (Mindframe 9), classroom climate Mindframe 4), an emphasis on assessment (Mindframes 1 and 2) and feedback (Mindframe 6), focus on the individual needs of students (Mindframe 3), and students showing growth and confidence (Mindframe 5). Teachers who understand these mindframes are more equipped to impact student learning through their effective teaching (DeYoung, 2015; Hattie, 2012). What is important is that the teacher knows what is worth changing (Hanushek, 2011). Studies have been conducted that have examined teacher beliefs, teaching behavior, and the impact on student academic achievement (Hsiao & Yang, 2010; Kyriakides, Christoforou, & Charalambous, 2013; Muijs & Reynolds, 2002; Munoz, Scoskie, & French, 2013; Qureshi & Niazi, 2012; Skourdoumbis, 2014); however, none have examined the relationship of teacher beliefs and student achievement using Hattie’s mindframes. Since effective teaching is the most important factor to student success, Hattie (2012) asserts that teachers who develop this way of thinking have the “greatest potential to
positively impact student learning and achievement” (p. 118). Notably, Hattie uses the word “evidence” for collecting data on the teachers’ impact on student learning. He purports that teachers need to change their mindframes from accountability to sharing collaboratively and understanding what success and impact look like. Hattie has claimed that

the major underlying powerful impacts in our schools relates to how we think! It is a set of Mindframes that underpin our every action and decision in a school; it is a belief that we are evaluators, change agents, adaptive learning experts, seekers of feedback about our impact, engaged in dialogue and challenge, and developers of trust with all, and that we see opportunity in error, and are keen to spread the message about the power, fun, and impact that we have on learning. (p. 97)

Hattie also found when teachers and school leaders develop these ways of thinking, student learning is greatly influenced.

In addition to Hattie’s (2009, 2012) research on mindframes, several researchers have found interchangeable themes when it comes to teachers’ mindframes about student growth. Guskey (1988) determined that teacher beliefs about instruction are important in determining student behavior and attitude toward change. Arrighi and Young (1987), who also looked at teacher perceptions pertaining to student success, found that teachers’ beliefs about success are important indicators of student achievement. This belief is also held by Hsiao and Yang (2010), who found that teaching beliefs are a key factor that influence teachers’ teaching behavior and thus impact students’ interest in learning. As a result, using Hattie’s mindframes as a basis for understanding effective teaching is a compelling example of the research pertaining to student learning and success indicators (Arrighi & Young, 1987; Guskey, 1988; Hattie, 2009, 2012; Hsiao & Yang, 2010).

Understanding these mindframes will support teachers’ deliberate thinking about how and what they teach as well as how relationships are built with students. For teachers to
understand their impact on student learning, it is essential to understand how reforms, through the eye of change theory, affect teachers and students alike when it comes to learning and application of new skills (Hattie, 2012). The following section provides a detailed description of two change theories as they relate to educational reform. Along with Hattie’s 10 mindframes, I will also be incorporating change theory into the conceptual framework as a tool to support the organization within the context of CCSS.

**Change Theory**

Researchers in education have proposed several revised models that support change initiatives (Ellsworth, 2000; Ely, 1990; Fullan, 2007). A change initiative is any reform or program intended to fundamentally alter the culture of the school and improve student learning outcomes (Kruse & Louis, 2009). However, change initiatives are rarely sustained over a period of time and often do not meet the intended expectations (Hargreaves, 2009). Ely’s (1990) groundbreaking study examined the culture of a school and its willingness and readiness to accept and implement change (Ellsworth, 2000). Ely was one of the first researchers to take a closer look at the environment in which the change was occurring and how the environment affects the success of the change initiative (Ellsworth, 2000).

Fullan (2002, 2007, 2011) focused much of his research on the implementation of change with an emphasis on educational change initiatives. Fullan (2002) focused his research on roles and strategies of change agents within a system. Fullan utilized many components of Ely’s and Ellsworth’s change initiative models to develop his own change model. Fullan’s view of leadership is a systems approach, mainly focusing on the idea that the success of any change initiative is dependent on the entire system of change agents (teachers, parents, students,
administrators, etc.). A change agent is an individual who influences innovations and decisions in a desirable direction (Rogers, 1996). Fullan studied the correlation of the implementation of change and the success of the system being changed.

Fullan’s (2001) change theory has three phases: initiation, implementation, and sustainability. Implementing a change process is difficult and teachers often struggle to initiate, implement, and sustain research-based reforms and initiatives (Reeves, 2009). The initiation of a change phase includes choosing a reform initiative and understanding the “forces that drive” that change within schools (Bourke & McGee, 2012). The implementation phase is the organization of the plan to make sure that the specifics of the plan are fulfilled during the change initiative (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). The sustainability phase is what takes place to ensure the initiative continues to meet the expectations set forth in the reform (Hargreaves, 2009; Holmes, Clement, & Albright, 2013). Table 2 illustrates the similarities between Fullan’s and Ely’s change theories.

As seen in Table 2, most of Ely’s (1990, 1999) conditions are present in Fullan’s (with Stiegelbauer, 1991) phases. The initiation and implementation phases surrounding change proposed by Fullan are embedded within one of the eight conditions presented by Ely. Because of the interrelatedness of Ely’s conditions, Ensminger and Surry (2008) caution implementers not to focus on any one condition. They note this can affect the strength of another condition and ultimately the combined effect of all factors on implementation. Since educational change depends on what teachers do and think, the more complex the change, the more interaction is required to implement it successfully. Thus, the implementation of a change involves a direct change in practice (Fullan, 2007; Hattie, 2009).
Table 2
Ely and Fullan: Change Theory Comparisons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ely’s Change Theory</th>
<th>Comparison to Fullan’s Change Theory Phases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dissatisfaction with the status quo</td>
<td>Initiation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and skills exist</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources are available</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time is available</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards or incentives exist for participants</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation is expected and encouraged</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment by those who are involved</td>
<td>Sustainability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of leadership</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One of the major similarities in both researchers’ change conditions is how the implementation is interpreted in each setting, which is the human element. Muhammad (2009) calls this factor the greatest impact toward the success or failure of any change initiative. According to Muhammad, the human element, present in Fullan’s (with Stiegelbauer, 1991) theory, refers to the people within the school who are directly responsible for the initiation, implementation, and sustainability of the change initiative. Teachers, the ones directly engaged in the implementation process, have the greatest impact on the success or failure of any educational change initiative (Gialamas, Pelonis, & Medeiros, 2014; Hattie, 2009). If the people within a school have the greatest impact on the success of the implementation of change, then
understanding the thinking of these implementers is important (Zembylas & Barker, 2007). In comparison with Ely’s (1990) conditions of change, if the eight conditions exist in the environment during the implementation stage, the likelihood of the change agents (teachers, students, parents, etc.) implementing success will occur. Without the conditions, the adoption of the innovation will be impeded and, thus, the implementation will fail.

The literature related to school change initiatives suggests that in a typical change process a clear vision of what the stakeholders want to accomplish and how the initiative will affect the school must be in place for the school to embrace the journey of change (Fullan, 2007). Since a change initiative is any reform or program implemented within a school/district with the “intent of altering current practices to improve student achievement and the culture of the school” (Fullan, 2007, p. 52), it is imperative to look at change theory and how it relates to Hattie’s (2009, 2012) mindframes and teachers’ practices that support the implementation of a change in a school. Although Ely (1990) and Fullan each have change theories that are distinct, I have chosen to focus on Fullan’s three phases because they focus on the human element of teaching more than Ely’s. This study focused on the perspectives of teachers during a change initiative and how those perspectives influenced their instructional practice rather than the environment.

**Conceptual Framework**

Fullan’s change theory model and Hattie’s mindframes formed the conceptual framework for this study. These frameworks, coupled with existing literature, may advance theory in the areas of reform movement, teacher perceptions, and instruction. Hattie’s (2009, 2012) mindframes center on teachers understanding the impact they have on student achievement through relationships, conversations, assessments, and deep knowledge of their students and
content. For the CCSS to be implemented successfully, first teachers need to understand the process through effective PL organized through a change model perspective. The next step is having teachers understand how their mindframes impact the success their students have in mastering the rigorous standards of the CCSS.

This can only be accomplished through targeted, continuous PL for teachers to understand and unpack the rigorous standards (Covay Minor et al., 2016). This will support the shift in mindframes for teachers who do not see themselves as change agents in the success and failure of their students (Desimone, 2011). In addition to changing how teachers think, changing how students learn can be an uphill battle. Yet, the literature suggests the biggest impact on learning is made by how educators think about learning (Desimone, 2011; Hattie, 2012). Hattie (2012) identified a number of core beliefs that underpin the actions and decisions of highly effective teachers. One of the main beliefs is that teachers who have high expectations of their students are more likely to have high expectations of themselves and, thus, want to change for the better. They also set up a classroom learning environment with a high element of trust so students feel free to question and be challenged.

With change and reform in education being constant, the mindframes are one way teachers can stay on top of the new initiatives without the fear of job burnout or of not performing to the highest degree possible for students (Santoro, 2011). No matter what change initiative or reform is placed on teachers, they will prevail with the Mindframes being present in their daily teaching (Airini et al., 2006). With changes promoted by the rigor of CCSS, the resource allotment, and the lack of defined and continuous PL, I hypothesize teachers struggle with the challenges in curriculum planning and the related instructional decisions they make for their students. However, if teachers consider the mindframes and work to understand that what
they believe matters in student development and learning, no matter what reform occurs, teachers will prevail.

Hattie (2012) contends that the CCSS may be a challenge; however, “the greater the challenge, the higher the probability that one seeks and needs feedback, but the more important it is that there is a teacher to provide feedback and to ensure that the learner is on the right path to successfully meet the challenges” (p. 213). This quotation applies to the CCSS reform effort, but it also purports that effective feedback and support for teachers make the greatest impact on student achievement and teachers can rise to meet the challenge if they know what the change initiative entails.

Generally speaking, through effective implementation of a change, teachers should feel more confident influencing student achievement through discovering what the students’ expectations are and pushing the learners to exceed those expectations. This can be seen in Mindframes 1, 2, and 8 (Hattie, 2009). Once a student has performed at a level beyond his/her own expectations, he/she gains confidence in his or her learning ability. This can be displayed in effective feedback (Mindframe 6). The major theme in Hattie’s 2009 book can be summed up as empowering teachers and school leaders to have the mindset “know thy impact” (p. 4). This leads to paying closer attention to teachers’ awareness of their impact on their students’ learning through Mindframes 4 and 5 in assessment of learning and conversations. This connects to Ely’s (1990) participation condition of change. In Mindframes 9 and 10, educators are focused on developing positive relationships and the language of learning, which can be seen in Ely’s commitment condition. Fullan (2007) and Ely (1990) both have a leadership component in their change theories, and although Hattie does not specifically talk about leadership qualities, he does
suggest a mindframe that speaks to never retreating from doing one’s best and enjoying challenges from others in Mindframe 5.

The two widely accepted sources of change are external and internal (Bourke & McGee, 2012). External forces refer to federal and state legislation or mandates and directives from the local education authority (Hargreaves, 2009). Bourke and McGee (2012) suggest the external change agents for schools are the policymakers, and the external implementers are the state and district leaders. The internal change agents are the principals, and the internal implementers are the teachers. Often the change agents and implementers are not on the same page, making reform efforts difficult to sustain and implement to a high degree of efficiency (Sevier, 2008).

The history of federal change initiatives shows a clear delineation of the many external forces for change that have affected schools at the local level. Other external change forces come from state and district levels that impose change on principals and schools (Hargreaves, 2009). Externally mandated change initiatives contradict the research, stating that the success of a change initiative is increased when there is input and buy-in at the building level (Priestley, 2011). This history of external change acts as an indicator of why reforms are so difficult to initiate, implement, and sustain within a school.

The literature related to school change initiatives suggests that in a typical change process, a clear vision of what the stakeholders want to accomplish and how the initiative will affect the school must be in place for those within the school to embrace the journey of change. Without it, effective implementation of the change is a challenge.
Conclusion

It is important to note numerous factors influence change in education. As shown, policy and the history of educational reforms are factors in this process, as is the way teachers think about teaching and implementing the process of the change. Teachers are at the heart of any educational improvement (Airini et al., 2006). Any benefits for students that arise from educational policies require key attributes of high-quality teachers: commitment, love of children, mastery of instructional practices and models of teaching, the ability to collaborate with other teachers, and a capacity for reflection (Hopkins & Stern, 1996). This study, therefore, focused on the teacher and the role the teacher plays in understanding, implementing, and sustaining the change process of the CCSS, all while supporting student-focused benefits from the educational reform. I focused on how teachers’ attitudes toward and demeanor in traditional teaching have changed with the heightened policy attention to school accountability over the last seven years under CCSS. Teachers’ attitudes toward the CCSS reform were organized around Hattie’s (2009, 2012) mindframes for student learning and traced how the teachers play a role in the change process.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine elementary teachers’ perceptions about their experiences implementing the CCSS, instructional decision making and changes to their instruction based on the PL they received related to the districtwide reform initiative. This chapter includes the reasons for choosing a qualitative research design, a description of the teacher participants, specifics about the data collection procedures, and an explanation of the data analysis used. The following questions guided this study:

1. What are elementary teachers’ perceptions about their experiences implementing Common Core State Standards initiated by the district and the professional learning they received?

2. How do elementary teachers describe their decision making and changes in instruction based on the professional learning they received when implementing Common Core State Standards?

3. What successes and challenges have elementary teachers experienced in using the Common Core State Standards in their instructional delivery?

Research Design

Mertens (2014) describes qualitative research as a type of investigation framed by research questions best answered using this approach, which is true of my study. Another reason
I chose a qualitative design is that the findings focused on the teachers’ perceptions and how they experienced the CCSS implementation process. A qualitative phenomenological design focuses on a particular experience (i.e., in this study the implementation of the CCSS by teachers) and on the “wholeness of [that] experience” (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas viewed experience and behavior as an integrated relationship based on the phenomenon being investigated. This insight was gained from the elementary teachers’ perspectives.

Lastly, I began to identify themes in the phenomenon studied through detailed descriptions of the participants’ experiences. As Moustakas (1994) explained, it is then that the analyses of the data can begin by piecing through the data for significant statements or quotations and then combining the statements into themes. Following that, I created a description of how the elementary teachers experienced the CCSS reform initiative in terms of the learning and how that learning was applied in their classrooms.

**Researcher Positionality**

Currently, I am an ISC in the school district of this study. However, during the CCSS implementation in the district, I was a reading specialist. In that role, I received different and more in-depth PL on the CCSS at a different building than the teachers who were interviewed. I believed that there was a discrepancy in the PL the teachers in the district received, and this belief prompted my interest in studying more about reform implementation. I believe that when
an education change is implemented teachers all need to receive the same PL so that expectations are set for classroom implementation processes. This is something that I hold true to as I have taken on a new role in the district. When my role changed in 2014 to that of an ISC, I also changed elementary school buildings within the district. In this new role, I have been involved in developing and delivering PL for Story Elementary, mainly in the area of math. The focus has been on understanding the progression in math and going deeper into unpacking those standards. This PL was new to the staff at this building. Once again, because of my role as an ISC in the building for the past four years, I do have a professional relationship with the staff at this building, and I may have developed a personal belief or judgment not founded on proof regarding the teachers’ professional role in their classrooms. Because of these beliefs, the research and results could be influenced. However, I minimized the conflicts of interest and worked to not jeopardize the integrity of the research by using several validation strategies, including member checking, peer reviewers, and utilization of multiple data sources (i.e., interviews, documentation).

My role was to support teachers in making informed instructional decisions based on student need and data. Husserl (1964) reminds us that total involvement within a phenomenon is not only what permits one to be objective, it also represents the purest, richest, form of objectivity. As such, I wanted to understand more about classroom teacher perspectives on the implementation and the changes in instructional decision making due to the implementation process of the CCSS.
The district in which I conducted my research is a K-12 Community Unit School District in a suburb of Chicago, Illinois. The district serves approximately 12,500 students in 10 public elementary schools, one public primary school, one public intermediate school, three public middle schools, and two public high schools. Three schools in the district have been honored by the U.S. Department of Education as Blue Ribbon Schools. The award recognizes excellence in teaching and instruction, student achievement, leadership, and parent involvement. To contribute to the success of the district teachers, about 65% of the District’s teachers hold master’s or higher degrees. I interviewed teachers from one of the elementary buildings. To keep the name of the school confidential, the pseudonym Story Elementary was used. I selected this elementary school over the other elementary options in the district because this school had the lowest amount of teacher turnover in the district. Teachers tend to stay at Story Elementary once they start there. Thus, more than 85% of the teachers have been at Story Elementary since the CCSS reform began in 2013. All of the teachers in the study had taught at the school for over 10 years.

When the study was conducted, the total population at Story Elementary included 369 students. The diversity of the student population was less than 2%, and only 28 students qualified for free and reduced lunch. The student-to-teacher ratio at this building was 23:1. Although instructional support had changed over the past 10 years in regard to who served as the instructional support coach (ISC), Story Elementary had the same building principal since 2007. The ISC’s responsibilities included working in tandem with the building leadership team to support building learning goals and embed individual teacher PL in the classroom setting. The building leadership team consisted of two classroom teacher representatives, a special education
teacher representative, and a reading specialist. However, the ISC had the sole responsibility for supporting teachers’ continued learning and implementation of new initiatives, like the CCSS. Along with the CCSS reform, several other initiatives were occurring simultaneously at Story Elementary. These reforms included implementation of a new ELA resource (Literacy by Design) as well as implementing a new math resource. Beyond CCSS reform and new resource implementation, the school district was also implementing Charlotte Danielson’s Framework for Teaching Evaluation instrument. With all of the initiatives that were being presented to teachers, it was a challenge to focus on the CCSS instructional decisions in the classroom.

Common Core Standards District Reform Initiative

The implementation of the CCSS impacted all educators in Illinois by changing the standards taught (Common Core State Standards, 2011; Jacobsen & Saultz, 2012). Each district within the state was held to high standards of providing educators with needed PL to implement the new standards successfully. This particular suburban school district provided the initial training about the standards to the ISC housed in every elementary building as well as the principal at each building during the summer of 2013. See Appendix A for the agendas of those meetings. The responsibility was then placed on the instructional coach and building leader for how they would share the new learning with their certified staff members. See Appendix B for the 2012-13 School Improvement Plan created by the ISC and principal for Story Elementary to support the learning of the CCSS in reading and math.

Although some district instructional coaches collaborated to create plans that were similar, the training all teachers received specific to the CCSS and the depth of knowledge about
how the standards differed from previous standards varied by elementary building. The key shifts in the standards were:

1. Regular practice with complex texts and their academic language
2. Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from texts, both literary and informational
3. Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction

This training depended on the depth of knowledge each ISC and principal had regarding the standards and how they presented the new learning to their staff members. The depth of knowledge regarding the CCSS could be seen when district grade-level teams of teachers met to plan units of instruction based on the standards. It was determined by the district curriculum director that all teachers needed to understand the major instructional shifts and how to deconstruct the CCSS for instructional decision making (Bomer & Maloch, 2011; Common Core State Standards, 2011). This optional training, centered on the key instructional shifts and deconstructing standards, was offered as a course to all teachers during the 2013-14 school year and again in the summer of 2014. These courses could be taken for district credit or stipend. The focus of the learning was taking each teacher’s grade-level-specific ELA standards and deconstructing them to better understand what it is that teachers need to teach to ensure students are learning. Very few teachers took the opportunity to take this course during the school year or summer PL months. None of the teachers interviewed took the district courses offered by the district to enhance their understanding of the CCSS, nor did the principal at Story Elementary promote the need for this course, as self-reported by the interviewees.

Effective principal leaders who create structures that promote teacher learning are more likely to receive support from their teachers when initiating new practices in curriculum (Berry
At the time of the study, the principal at Story Elementary had been the building leader for nine years. She was dedicated to supporting her teachers’ learning and her students’ academic and social-emotional well-being. This was evidenced by her involvement in district and school committees to increase teachers’ knowledge through PL and team building. For example, she was a part of the initial team of educators who created the literacy units for the district as well as a proud member of a principals committee created after the first year of CCSS implemented at Story Elementary, called the Technology Integration Committee. This committee worked to integrate different forms of technology into each grade-level curriculum. The principal at Story Elementary could be characterized as a life-long learner, who, at the time of the study, was pursuing her doctorate in education to continue supporting the field of education.

Teacher Participants

The participants in this study were third- or fifth-grade teachers from Story Elementary, each with a minimum of 10 years of teaching experience. The decision to include third-grade teachers was because that particular grade level represents the middle of elementary school and they were the initial grade level required to take the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC) accountability assessment that measures attainment of the CCSS. I also chose to include fifth-grade teachers because fifth-grade students are also assessed using the PARCC, which is used district and statewide to determine attainment of the CCSS. I chose not to utilize primary teachers in this study because K-2 teachers emphasize learning to read with the foundational skills emphasized in the CCSS instead of reading to learn. “The research is clear that if children cannot read proficiently by the end of third grade, they face daunting hurdles to success in school and beyond” (Zakariya, 2015, p. 1). Third grade marks a pivotal point in
reading because research shows that if students are not reading on grade level when they begin fourth grade, as much as half of the curriculum they will be taught will be incomprehensible (Weyer, 2018). It is during this year that students begin encountering a wide variety of complex texts. Thus, teachers in Grades 3-5 need to understand how to support students in analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating texts according to the CCSS that continues to appear in the standards through Grade 12. This requires a higher level of comprehension skill, which does not appear in the CCSS for K-2 teachers.

As such, I used critical case sampling to identify the teachers selected for the study. Critical case sampling is a process of selecting a small number of important cases. In total, I selected four participants from Story Elementary. Although there were nine teachers available as participants for the study, only four met the criteria of 10 years of teaching experience and who had been at Story Elementary for the duration of the implementation of the CCSS. I was aware the results would not be transferable across populations; however, the selected participants were likely to "yield the most information and have the greatest impact on the development of knowledge" (Patton, 2001, p. 236).

A month prior to beginning the study, I contacted the teachers via their school email addresses to explain why I was seeking to recruit them and explained the intent of the study as well as the time commitment required for the study. I collected a signed consent (Appendix D) from each teacher, which included confidentiality guidelines. These guidelines consisted of pseudonyms to keep the names of the teachers confidential.
Description of Teachers Who Participated

A total of four elementary teachers participated in the study. Table 3 presents demographic information about the teachers, including their names (pseudonyms), age, grade level, years of teaching experience, and years within the district.

Table 3
Teacher Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Total Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Years in the District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lola Sands</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29 years</td>
<td>27 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mae Dudek</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie Hart</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>22 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kate Land</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>10 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants who volunteered to be part of this study were female and taught either third or fifth grade at Story Elementary. All were tenured, ranging in teaching experience from 12 to 29 years. A narrative description of each teacher follows.

Lola Sands

Lola is a happy-go-lucky, 58-year-old veteran teacher. Her warm smile depicts her zest for life. Lola has taught in several schools within and outside the district for 27 years. The last
six years have been at Story Elementary as a second-and third-grade teacher. Her teaching experience started at an urban elementary school where she taught preschool and kindergarten for two years. She then taught first grade for 10 years at one of the elementary schools in the district where this study took place before changing schools to teach kindergarten at the Early Childhood and Primary Center. Subsequently, she switched from being a classroom teacher to being an instructional support coach (ISC). This position was just beginning to take root in the district. Moreover, Lola helped shape what the ISC position is today at the district level and at Story Elementary. For six years, Lola supported teachers as an ISC, and then she moved to Story Elementary to teach second and third grades, where she remains today. Lola is on the retirement track and will do so in 2020. She is looking forward to traveling with her husband of 35 years and spending quality time with her new granddaughter.

Beyond the daily classroom experience, Lola is a significant part of the Building Leadership Team. She also serves as the Spirit Club teacher representative, which entails supporting third- through fifth-grade students who want to make a difference by creating service-learning projects for the whole school. In addition, Lola is a member of the district Handwriting Committee tasked with choosing a resource for K-5 students in the coming year. Unequivocally, Lola is a committed and involved member of the school community. She feels that through serving on different committees (Building Leadership, Spirit Club, Handwriting Committee) she is able to learn about district initiatives, meet other teachers to augment her professional learning network, and stay abreast of new and better ways to teach the whole child.

Throughout the study, Lola was highly professional in her responses and added to what others said in an articulate and educated manner. During her bi-weekly reflections, she was able to describe her understanding of the CCSS using very precise language, even quoting several
standards in her responses. During the focus group, she often rephrased what the other teachers said, adding her own thinking but building a deeper understanding of those participating in the study. They agreed with her sentiments more often than they disagreed.

Mae Dudek

Mae is a 51-year-old veteran teacher. She is an outgoing, talkative, and student-friendly teacher. Of the four participants, Mae had the most diverse teaching background. Her professional career included teaching kindergarten in the inner city of Chicago for one year and then fourth grade in an affluent district during the next year. She subsequently moved to yet another suburban school for a first-grade position before going back to work with kindergarten children in a culturally diverse district for eight more years. After that, she came to teach in the district in which this study occurred.

When Mae joined the district, she taught both kindergarten and first grade. She then became an ISC at one of the primary schools (PK-2). However, after serving in that role for two years, Mae missed being with her own students, so she returned to the classroom as a third-grade teacher at Story Elementary, where she remains today.

Mae has an inquisitive personality and is always reading to improve her craft. Her dedication to academic excellence and seeing her students excel is readily apparent by the extra effort she puts into her lesson planning and assessments. She is a sought-after PL facilitator in the district and has taught several literacy classes throughout her career. As noted in her interview, her deep understanding of the CCSS stemmed from her own reading, including books such as *Pathways to the Common Core* by Lucy Calkins, Mary Ehrenworth, and Christopher
Mae’s definition of the CCSS, as well as her interpretation of the standards, align with the initiative to establish consistent educational expectations across states (Dingman et al., 2013). Mae was quick to express her opinion about the positive and negative aspects of the CCSS and its effects on teachers and students. Her opinions about the districtwide CCSS reform initiative were all supported with examples from her third-grade classroom.

Mae viewed change in education as “the only thing that is constant” and expressed how she embraces it (Mae, Interview 3). This demeanor was reflected in Mae’s responses to shifts in learning, teaching, and standards for planning.

Jackie Hart

Jackie is a 46-year-old woman with an outspoken and honest nature coupled with a strong desire for success. She says what is on her mind and is not afraid to challenge one’s thinking. Jackie thrives on familiarity and routine. This is evident in how she teaches. Although the current social studies curriculum does not mandate content to be chronological, Jackie chooses to teach her students in a sequence that mimics history. For example, the overarching social science question was what makes a successful community? In her bi-weekly reflections, Jackie shared that although she could have chosen any context within history to teach the concept, she chose to start with Columbus and move to early America because it is sequential. Another example is the way she sets her students up for success with a daily morning routine to help them form good time management habits.
Like Jackie’s teaching style, her educational life is also very predictable. She attended Story Elementary as a child and returned as a fourth-grade teacher after graduating with her elementary teaching certification. She taught at Story Elementary for five years before her first child was born. At that point, she chose to work part time as a social-emotional learning (SEL) coordinator for the district while her children were young. She held that position for 10 years before returning to the classroom full time as a fifth-grade teacher at Story Elementary.

Much like Lola, Jackie is a valued member of the district learning community. For instance, she was selected to participate in the district’s Future Leaders class. She always wants to further her education. Jackie obtained her library science degree and has taken over 30 hours of PL classes just because of her students’ needs. She is a certified Google Educator, a Seesaw Ambassador, and Story Elementary’s go-to-teacher for everything technology.

Jackie and Mae are very similar in their learning styles and characteristics. Jackie is a self-directed learner. In her interview, she too referenced reading several Common Core books at the time of implementation and talking with colleagues to expand her knowledge and understanding (Jackie, Focus Group). Several times during the individual interviews, Jackie referred to the standards as “too rigorous for our learners” and expressed her concern about the district with regard to lack of follow-up training and teacher feedback (Jackie, Interview 3). She also emphasized the need for CCSS revisions. Although Jackie is a true believer in the power of a teacher’s instruction, she feels the CCSS are not preparing students for the future as the CCSS declare (Jackie, Interview 3). Jackie supported the need for standards; however, she believed more time should be spent on SEL skills because she feels they are lacking in students today (Jackie, Focus Group). Consequently, she voiced a great need for future PL to focus on SEL in the classroom.
Kate Land

Kate is a 36-year-old woman with a quiet demeanor. Kate’s personality comes across as shy and meek; however, she is a passionate, dedicated, outspoken teacher when she is comfortable and in front of children. She comes from a family of teachers; therefore, she felt that becoming a teacher “was in her DNA” (Kate, Interview 1). In 2006, she started her career teaching second grade in a district not associated with this study. Then she came to Story Elementary two years later to teach third grade for two years. After that, she decided to loop with her students to teach fourth grade for one year. For the past six years, Kate has been teaching fifth grade at Story Elementary. It was during this time that she earned her master’s degree in reading. She now aspires to be a reading specialist in an elementary school.

For the past two years, Kate has been an active member of the Building Leadership Team. She also volunteered to serve on the Student Services Team due to her dedication to ensuring all students are included in a regular education classroom. Kate has a caring and affectionate nature that makes all students feel supported and comfortable in her presence.

Throughout the study, Kate recalled much about the CCSS reform initiative and how she felt during implementation. Her frustration and lack of understanding of the CCSS presented a drastically different voice in the interviews as well as in the focus group. “The Common Core was not ‘common’ at all. The shifts were challenging and difficult to break down” (Kate, Interview 2).
Data Collection

I chose four types of data to answer the research questions: individual structured interviews, a focus group, bi-weekly reflections, and artifacts/records gathered from the teachers. Each is discussed below.

Structured Interviews

The goal of this qualitative study was to understand elementary teachers’ perceptions about a districtwide reform initiative focused on the CCSS. In-depth structured interviews are optimal for collecting data on individuals’ personal histories, perspectives, and experiences (McNamara, 2009). One way this was accomplished was through structured interviews conducted over a three-week time frame in mid-July 2018 (see Appendix E). Each interview lasted 60-90 minutes, and the time frame between each interview was three to seven days. The interviews took place in each individual teacher’s classroom. Story Elementary is always the first school to be cleaned in the district, so teachers had access to their classrooms in early July. Some of the teachers did not have their classrooms set up for students, but we still met in their classrooms during the individual interviews. The participants were asked about their availability pertaining to day and time, and I worked around their schedules.

The first interview established the “context of the participants’ experience” (Seidman, 2006) with a focus on their past history as an educator as well as their perspectives about the districtwide reform focused on the CCSS. The second interview allowed each teacher to recount the details of the implementation process and PL and was followed by the third interview, which was a reflection about that process and what the teachers are doing now regarding instructional
decision making (Moustakas, 1994; Seidman, 2006). See Table 4 for alignment of my research questions and the structured interview questions.

The goal of the interview process was to understand how the teachers understood and made meaning of their experiences implementing the CCSS. To address validity, I interviewed the four teachers and sought to connect their experiences and comments to the other teachers by using the three-part interview series. Additionally, the answers to the first interview guided the second and third interview questions. Based on the recommendations by Bernard (1988), I recorded all of the interviews to ensure an exact record of what the teachers said.

The sequence of the interviews followed guidelines established by Seidman (2006), meaning the structure of the interview questions had to be purposeful. Since this study was interested in the perspectives of these chosen elementary teachers regarding the CCSS reform as well as the instructional decisions they made during implementation, each teacher had a personal experience that might, or might not, be the same. The next data source, the focus group, helped to corroborate the experiences of the teachers based on their interview answers.

**Focus Group**

A specific set of questions was asked of the teachers so they could give their explanation and perspective about the implementation of the CCSS as well as respectfully agree or disagree with other third- and fourth-grade teachers’ perspectives of the same topic (see Appendix F). The queries were grouped into descriptive questions that asked the teachers to describe their experiences. The reason for using descriptive questions was to determine what was happening, how something was happening, or why something was happening. By asking these types of
questions, insight was provided into other areas I had not considered as well as general questions for all teachers to answer. An example of a descriptive question I used is, “What do you believe to be the greatest challenge in implementing the CCSS in your classroom?”

The second strategy was using structural questions to help me understand the relationships among PL instructional decisions and the CCSS. Typically, this type of query can be answered in a specific way, such as yes, no, good, or not good; however, the teachers were then asked to elaborate on their answers. A sample question I used during the focus group included, “Did you participate in PL on the CCSS? If so, what PL on the CCSS have you participated in?” In gathering the answers to these types of questions, I began to categorize groups of like ideas or like processes about the CCSS in regard to PL and instructional decisions. Lastly, contrast questions supported my understanding of what certain terms meant to gain greater perspective about each teacher. Contrast research questions examined the differences between two or more ideas. Such questions typically started by asking, “What is the difference in…?” An example of one such question is, “What is the difference in the CCSS and career and college readiness?” Table 5 shows the alignment of the research questions with my focus group questions.

The focus group lasted approximately 90 minutes and was held in August 2018. The focus group was held at the school to accommodate each teacher’s comfort level and schedule. I stressed confidentiality in the group, so they knew their answers would not be shared publicly and could speak freely without the threat of retaliation or peer pressure to answer. An audio recording was used during the focus group so transcription of the focus group was verbatim.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Structured Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What are elementary teachers’ perceptions about their experiences implementing Common Core State Standards initiated by the district and the professional learning they received? | • Discuss your interpretation of the purpose of the Common Core standards (Interview 1).  
• How knowledgeable are you about the content of the CCSS (Interview 1)?  
• Do you prefer whole group staff development training where you can observe and listen or do you prefer small group trainings where you can participate and interact with others (Interview 2)?  
• What opportunities were you provided to network with other educators at the district level (Interview 2)?  
• On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the least and 5 being the most, what is the professional learning support level for the CCSS in your opinion? Do you think there will be strong support for the curriculum shift? If so what kind of support (Interview 2)?  
• Explain how the professional learning that you received on the CCSS was an important component in meeting the needs of students (Interview 2).  
• Explain what types of professional learning opportunities you would like to see offered now having implemented the standards since 2012-13 (Interview 2).  
• What professional learning resources do you think should be offered to support you during this transition (Interview 3)? |
| How do elementary teachers describe their decision making and changes in instruction based on the professional learning they received when implementing Common Core State Standards? | • What resources were you provided with that aligned with the CCSS? What is your opinion on the use of the resources provided (Interview 3)?  
• How would you recommend resources and strategies be shared among educators and schools within the district (Interview 3)? |
| What successes and challenges have elementary teachers experienced in using the Common Core State Standards in their instructional delivery? | • What are your main areas of concern in regards to implementing the CCSS since implementation (Interview 1)?  
• Please, share any comments or concerns that you may have had or are currently experiencing in regards to the implementation of the CCSS and professional learning (Interview 2). |
Bi-Weekly Reflections

Since the goal of this qualitative study was to understand elementary teachers’ perceptions about the districtwide reform initiative focused on the CCSS, it was essential to identify the perspectives of the teachers about their instructional decisions and the delivery of instruction in their respective classrooms. I decided to use critical reflection as a major component for understanding teacher successes and challenges in their daily CCSS instruction. Critical reflection is the process by which adults identify their actions, reflect on their successes and challenges, and reflect on alternative instructional options (Cranton, 1996). The teachers reflected on the ELA standards being taught two times a week for four weeks. The reflection questions included the following: What are the successes and challenges during my lesson today in regards to my instructional decisions? What are the successes and challenges during my lesson today in regard to my instructional delivery? What considerations did I have when planning this lesson? How did I know that students achieved my learning targets”? The teachers recorded their thinking in a Google document that was shared with only myself as the researcher from September 2018-October 2018. After studying the body of research (Brookfield 2004; Reagan, Case, & Brubacher, 2000), this type of reflection supports a teacher’s knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
Through the process of critical reflection, adults come to interpret and create new knowledge and actions from their ordinary and sometimes extraordinary experiences (Shandomo, 2010). Critical reflection blends learning through experiences with theoretical and technical learning to form new knowledge constructions and new behaviors or insights (Shandomo, 2010). Although a template in Google Documents was provided for each teacher to record her thinking, the length of the reflections ranged from three to six typed pages for the eight reflections. Nineteen reflection pages were collected from the four teacher participants.
Table 5
Alignment of Research Questions and Focus Group Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Focus Group Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| What are elementary teachers’ perceptions about their experiences implementing Common Core State Standards initiated by the district and the professional learning they received? | • What is your comfort level with the transition to CCSS?  
• Did you participate in professional learning on the CCSS? If so, what professional learning on the CCSS have you participated in?  
• How prepared do you feel to implement the CCSS in your classroom with the amount of professional learning you have received? What makes you feel this way?  
• Do you think professional learning opportunities should provide opportunities for cross grade level communication? If so, what types of opportunities would you prefer?  
• Who provided the professional learning training you have participated in?  
• Are you familiar with resources outside your district to support you with the process of implementing the CCSS in your classroom?  
• What is the difference in the CCSS and ‘Career and College Readiness’?  
• What would be the most valuable professional learning opportunity that you would request, if any |
| How do elementary teachers describe their decision making and changes in instruction based on the professional learning they received when implementing Common Core State Standards? | • What is different in your instructional delivery using the CCSS and past standards?  
• What is your understanding of the available resources available to you on the CCSS that are not part of a formal training? |
| What successes and challenges have elementary teachers experienced in using the CCSS in their instructional delivery? | • What do you believe to be the greatest benefit to teachers while implementing the CCSS in your classroom?  
• What do you believe is the greatest challenge to teachers implementing the CCSS in your classroom? |
Artifacts/Records

Goetz and LeCompte (1984) define artifacts as things people make and do. To triangulate the data, the artifacts I was interested in obtaining were written lesson plan templates, textbooks, and other instructional materials as well as logs of meetings and activities pertaining to CCSS training. Since this took some investigation on the part of the teachers, Goetz and LeCompte (1984) identified four activities to support this type of data collection: "locating artifacts, identifying the material, analyzing it, and evaluating it" (p. 155). Since examining artifacts was the last data collection point, I asked the teachers for several of the documents they had talked about or referenced in their interviews and focus group. The more the teachers shared in support of their perceptions about instructional design making and delivery of the CCSS as part of a district reform initiative, the more useful the artifacts.

Bowen (2009) explained that documents have an advantage over interviews and focus groups because they are “exact...they detail events, are unobtrusive, and are non-reactive. Thus they are unaffected by the research process” (p.31). The artifacts collected from teachers that supported telling the story of implementation were School Improvement Plans for the first two years of implementation, meeting agendas focused on CCSS at Story Elementary as well as district meetings, and Literacy by Design teaching manuals used in the third-and fifth-grade classrooms the second year of implementation. Another shared document was the Literacy Walkthrough document and a template for how to teach close reading. Some of the artifacts collected from the four teachers were the sample; thus, six artifacts were collected for analysis. The artifacts supported telling the story and the history of the implementation process as well as helped to reveal the instructional decisions made by the teachers in the process. Additionally,
Bernard (1988) suggests using the artifacts in combination with interviews because the interpretation and the meaning of a specific artifact are often personal and subjective, so verification through triangulation was used.

Alignment

Table 6 contains a visual representation showing the alignment of the research questions with the data collection methods.

Table 6
Alignment of Research Questions with Data Collection Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Structured Interviews</th>
<th>Focus Group</th>
<th>Bi-Weekly Reflections</th>
<th>Artifacts / Records</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are elementary teachers’ perceptions about their experiences implementing Common Core State Standards initiated by the district and the professional learning they received?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do elementary teachers describe their decision making and changes in instruction based on the professional learning they received when implementing Common Core State Standards?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What successes and challenges have elementary teachers experienced in using the Common Core State Standards in their instructional delivery?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data Analysis

One of the most effective methods to ensure the data are reliable is to triangulate the data sources (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). A synthesis of the main themes from the interviews, focus group, bi-weekly reflections, and artifacts were compared and contrasted to analyze the evidence during data collection and to determine themes and patterns (Yin, 2011). This was done through transcription of the interviews and constant comparison data methods. According to Creswell (2007), “This is the core element of qualitative data analysis” (p. 148). A thorough analysis of the transcribed interviews and focus group facilitated identifying themes. This coupled with content analysis of the artifacts supported potential patterns present in the effective implementation of the CCSS and the educators’ instructional decision making.

Credibility of the study was secured through several actions, including member checking, peer reviewing, and triangulation. Member checking is a way for the teachers to see if the transcription matches the audio (Giorgi, 2012). All teachers were given the transcripts from the interviews and focus group to review for accuracy. Each teacher was given her transcript electronically in a Google document. The settings were set to “view only.” The participants were able to make comments on the document about the audio without changing the actual audio. Each teacher was given one full week to comment on the document; however, the only comments I received concerned misspellings or places where the audio cut out and I had added ellipses to indicate that it was inaudible. Mae and Jackie both asked what the significance of that punctuation meant but were fine with the response. All of the transcripts were verified by each individual teacher before coding. Furthermore, once the themes were determined, the teachers were given the chance to review the themes from the study and provide feedback. Once the
themes were created, I shared the theme matrix with each of the teachers electronically via Google Documents with the setting of view only. Each teacher was given one week to provide feedback. I only received feedback from three of the four teachers. The feedback was not about the themes themselves but about how I came to the conclusion of that particular theme or agreeing with the theme that emerged. The feedback was also used in the form of peer debriefing with other ISCs pursuing doctorates in curriculum and instruction. Lastly, triangulation was an important component for ensuring trustworthiness through multiple sources of data collection. The use of these sources of data served as a comparison as I identified themes and subthemes in the accumulated data sources.

**Interview Analysis**

All of the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The transcription was done verbatim for the structured interviews, with names and places changed for confidentiality purposes. I used the same template for all interview transcriptions, including a time code, interview question, and respondent answer recorded. After I transcribed the interviews, I used member checking with each of the teachers to make sure that what I recorded was accurate and valid.

Composite description was a viable next step in analysis because, through data collected during the interviews, I began to understand their experiences in relation to the CCSS implementation more thoroughly (Moustakas, 1994). In the next step of transcription, I only included complete thoughts and useful information. This step eliminated the small talk that occurred in some of the interviews.
As I moved into analyzing my structured interviews, I analyzed each teacher’s verbal data at a basic level of analysis (Moustakas, 1994). This is referred to as a descriptive account of the data and focused on what was actually said, documented, or observed, but with nothing read into it and nothing assumed about it (Measor, 1985). Then I took these data to a higher level of analysis called interpretative comparison (Yates, 2003). In this technique, I focused on what was meant by the response as well as what was inferred or implied. A matrix was created to help organize all of the interview data and to also have a place to add the data collected from other data techniques as themes emerged.

**Focus Group Analysis**

The transcription of the focus group was verbatim. I used member checking for this transcription to make sure the audio matched the transcription (Giorgi, 2012). The data collection method I used is described by Creswell (2007) in the following steps. First, I transcribed the data in the same way I did the interview data. Next, I identified my own experience with the implementation of the CCSS to help identify personal judgments so they did not affect the detailed process of analysis of the interviewee’s data. Third, I used horizontalization (Creswell, 2007). This step involved highlighting significant quotations or statements related to the implementation in each transcription. This is where the textual content analysis began as I pieced together what my participants were saying and identified broader themes from this group. After grouping the themes, I then wrote a textual description, including quotations that elicited the meaning behind the theme discovered in the focus group. Creswell (2007) describes the next step as the structural description, during which I looked at the facts and their meaning to recreate the
lived experience of the phenomenon of the standard implementation into a description for later analysis.

I then reviewed the transcripts so I could identify if there were any additional areas of interest for which I needed more information to determine if I needed to arrange for another focus group or possibly another individual interview. It was at this time I determined there was no need for an additional interview or focus group. Thus, all of the information was put into a matrix with the interview data where I began to see commonalities and differences in the collected data, and analysis of the phenomenon began.

**Bi-Weekly Reflection Analysis**

To analyze the data collected from the bi-weekly reflections, I used horizontalization (Creswell, 2007). Much like the focus group analysis, I highlighted significant quotations or statements related to the instruction and implementation in each teacher’s reflection. I then used textual content analysis as I pieced together what these teachers were saying about their instructional decisions and delivery of the CCSS in ELA and identified broader themes pertaining to decisions or delivery. After grouping the themes, I then matched the textual descriptions that were already created with my other collected data or created new textual descriptions. I then added these themes to my data matrix for further analysis.

**Artifact Analysis**

When I was analyzing the planning and standards alignments documents the teachers had created, I used content analysis (Berelson, 1952). This technique emphasizes frequency. I counted the occurrences of a word, phrase, or theme in each document. If needed I also requested
think-alouds with the teachers if I was not able to glean specific information from the plans and documents shared and the content analysis technique (Patton, 1990). I then used a specialized coding system to match codes throughout my other data collections looking for thematic analysis, often referred to as open coding. Open coding means summarizing the content of short sections of text in a few words on a line-by-line basis to look for themes (Mertens, 2014). Since the other data collection methods also had been taken through this process, a more detailed coding system was started. The collection of categories found from the content analysis supported the initial frame for the structured interviews and focus group.

The next step after determining the themes in all of the interview data, focus group data, bi-weekly reflections, and artifact data was to create broad categories from the multiple themes that emerged from the textual and structural descriptions as well as the interview themes, and I began to create the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Validation Procedures

As previously mentioned, validation procedures were put into place as the data were collected and analyzed. However, a peer also reviewed the transcribed data to begin the process of discovering the phenomenon behind the implementation and instructional decisions made based on the CCSS. This person was a teacher who was not in the same district being studied, who has her doctorate in curriculum and instruction, and who was familiar with qualitative study design. The reviewer elicited feedback on the matrix as well as the phenomenological findings. The reviewer’s feedback focused on what questions were asked in each interview and synthesized the theme by asking me guiding questions to think more deeply about a proposed theme: for example, “What is meant by learning progressions?” and “How does Theme 2 relate
to your framework of change theory or Hattie?” This feedback supported my attempts to keep the research valid and reliable as well as accurate (Creswell, 2007).

Limitations

One of the limitations to this study was the passage of time since the CCSS was implemented. This could have influenced what documentation the teachers shared or still had available at Story Elementary. Another limitation to the study is that data were self-reported by the teachers. That is, the teachers may not have remembered all of the truths, feelings, and sequences of events leading up to the implementation of the standards. This made it difficult to deduce the extraneous influences on teachers since CCSS implementation.

Delimitations

One delimitation to this study is that the population is small and the participation criteria (10 or more years of teaching experience) reduced the number of qualified teachers even more. Thus, the findings are not transferable across settings and other populations (Mertens, 2014). Furthermore, since the teachers in this research knew the researcher, there was a chance the responses to the questions might be what they thought the researcher wanted to hear rather than their perceived truths. Research precautions, such as member checking and peer review, were put into place to limit the effects of these delimitations.

Conclusion

This chapter delineated the reasons for choosing a qualitative research design, a description of the district and participants, the data collection procedures, and the data analysis
techniques, including the validation procedures. The following chapter will present the findings from the data analysis.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the data gathered from the teacher interviews, bi-weekly reflections, instructional artifacts, and focus group. The findings were synthesized to explore four elementary teachers’ perceptions about their experiences implementing, instructional decision making, and changes in instruction based on the PL they received implementing the CCSS districtwide reform initiative. Due to the interrelatedness of the research questions, the organization of the chapter is purposely chronological to capture how the three-year districtwide reform initiative was experienced by the teachers, including thematic connections.

Findings

To capture the teachers’ perceptions of their experiences about the CCSS districtwide reform initiative, I purposely chose to use four collection strategies that resulted in 15 data sets: three individual interviews, one focus group, eight bi-weekly reflections, and three curriculum artifacts per teacher. Using these qualitative sources allowed the teachers multiple opportunities to focus on their lived experiences and share their perspectives (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) about instructional decision making and delivery of the CCSS districtwide reform initiative. The research questions that were answered in this study are 1) What are elementary teachers’ perceptions about their experiences implementing Common Core State Standards initiated by the district and the professional learning they received? 2) How do elementary teachers describe
their decision making and changes in instruction based on the professional learning they received when implementing Common Core State Standards? 3) What successes and challenges have elementary teachers experienced in using the Common Core State Standards in their instructional delivery? Table 7 illustrates the themes and related subthemes that came from synthesizing the data to answer the research questions. The subthemes are arranged in sequence of time as well as the planning needs that arose in the three years after the CCSS adoption.

Focus of Professional Learning - Year 1

The first major theme focused on PL during Year 1 and evidence that the PL provided did not meet the intended PL outcomes as envisioned by the district. To substantiate this theme, 60 comments were extracted from Interviews 1, 2, and 3; the focus group; and the instructional artifacts. Mae’s cogent description is a good starting point for explaining this first theme. She explained that the first year of CCSS PL happened across the district on School Improvement Days as well as during building staff meetings. However, Mae recounted that receiving training did not necessarily equate to transferring knowledge and practices into the classroom. She explained, “Student learning and achievement should have increased when the teachers received PL focused on the skills needed to address new initiatives, but it rarely transferred into the classroom” (Interview 2). This perspective parallels Pfeffer and Sutton’s (2000) contention that people are “drowning in a sea of good intentions” because they spend too much time talking about an idea instead of making progress (p. 14). Mae went on to explain that that “the PL was all talk and no action. We looked at the standards until we could recite RL.3, but we didn’t learn how to use RL.3 in our teaching” (Mae, Interview 3).
Table 7

Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th># of Comments</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Research Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Focus of Professional Learning - Year 1</td>
<td></td>
<td>The PL provided did not meet the intended PL outcomes as envisioned by the district.</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Interview 1 Interview 2 Interview 3 Focus Group Instructional Artifacts</td>
<td>RQ1 RQ2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2011-12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Focus of Professional Learning - Year 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>There was an increased need for high-quality PL related to the standards.</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Interview 1 Interview 2 Interview 3 Focus Group Bi-weekly reflections Instructional Artifacts</td>
<td>RQ1 RQ2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and 3 (2012-14)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of standards to plan productively</td>
<td></td>
<td>There is a knowing and doing gap between understanding the standards and actually using them to plan instruction.</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>Interview 1 Interview 2 Interview 3 Focus group</td>
<td>RQ3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table continued on next page
| Change to an outcomes focus and volume of standards | When teachers focused on academic language and defining abstract terms within the standards, the changes in the standards and the number of standards became less of a concern. | 31 | Interview 2 Interview 3 Focus Group Bi-weekly reflections | RQ2 |
| Prioritize standards | Teachers became aware that instruction should address grade-specific standards in tandem with the broader goals of college and career readiness. | 37 | Interview 1 Interview 2 Interview 3 Focus Group | RQ1 RQ2 |
| Align the CCSS to other content taught | When teachers aligned the CCSS standards to other content taught, students became proficient in reading complex texts independently. | 32 | Interview 2 Interview 3 Focus group Bi-weekly reflections | RQ2 RQ3 |
| Effect of Learning Progressions on Accountability Measures | When teachers became aware of the learning progressions, they made more informed instructional decisions that aligned with assessments. | 88 | Interview 1 Interview 2 Interview 3 Focus Group | RQ2 RQ3 |
Lola and Kate extended Mae’s comments by explaining that the PL occurred at the individual building level more so than at a district level. This created pockets of teachers who had a deeper understanding than others as well as a need for teachers to seek PL on their own to fill in learning gaps about how to implement the standards. “We learned a great deal about the standards for third grade and how to read them, but my friend at another district building was learning how to use the standards in unit planning” (Mae, Focus Group). Kate added to Mae’s thinking by explaining:

Our PL was building-need focused, and we had a lot of teachers that needed to learn how to read the standards and interpret the meaning of them before we could start using them to plan. That is why I think we spent so much time with the standards and other buildings received PL on progressions and planning. (Focus Group)

In reflection, Lola explained that when the CCSS were adopted by the district in June 2010, the expectations for teachers were not clearly defined. Therefore, to make the definition and expectations of the CCSS more understandable, a team of teachers chosen from across the district created a literacy curriculum framework for implementation in the 2011-2012 academic year. The selected teachers began their work in the summer of 2010 (Mae, Interview 1) with the goal of creating a framework for each grade level. Jackie and Lola supplied Grades 3 and 5 frameworks as part of the instructional artifacts collected (Appendix B).

The grade-level frameworks consisted of each of the literacy areas defined in the Common Core, such as literature, informational, and reading foundational skills as well as Common Core topics and anchor standards. The skills, which were actually the standards, were then broken down into academic quarters to help the teachers organize their instructional planning (Lola, Interview 2). “We planned with our ISC, grade-level team and ISC once a quarter to create a plan for the next quarter. I remember we used the book Common Core
Curriculum Maps as a guide” (Lola, Interview 2). Due to differences in what this planning looked like at each elementary school, the standards were taught in a variety of ways across the district (Jackie, Interview 2). “We used to get together with our grade-level colleagues across the district to plan, but now we [were] isolated to our own building teams” (Jackie, Interview 2). According to Mae, the curriculum frameworks implemented at Story Elementary during the 2011-2012 school year are still identified on the district website as the official curriculum taught; however, they have “not been used in years” (Focus Group).

As the teachers used the frameworks to deliver their curriculum, they expressed they felt they needed more PL to understand each grade-level standard as well as what each standard could look like in a lesson. Mae, being the only teacher with a significant amount of outside district teaching experience, felt that the PL provided at Story Elementary was not sufficient. During Interview 2 Mae shared:

In my past district, we received outside PL from companies and from consultants when we had a new initiative. I have never received outside training in this district. Our teachers and ISCs are great, but sometimes we need outside perspectives and guidance.

This same feeling was expressed by Kate, Jackie, and Lola, all of whom had been in the district for several years before the CCSS initiative. “The district provided classes on the new standards, but they were not mandatory and they were over the summer. If I did not take the class, I was left to figure it out on my own” (Kate, Interview 3). Jackie added, “I did take the district CCSS course, but my teammates did not. I did not feel prepared to teach fifth-grade CCSS and teach my teammates how to use them” (Interview 3). Like Kate and Jackie, Lola also felt underprepared even after taking the CCSS course offered by the district:

The course, from what I remember, was an overview of the shifts moving from Illinois State Standards to CCSS. We learned about the organization of the standards and then we met in grade levels to closely read the standards. We specifically focused on the standard
in reading literacy and informational texts of close reading, since it was a new term and concept for us. (Focus Group)

Mae, Lola, and Jackie emphasized that they sought out their own PL regarding the CCSS by reading professional books to enhance their understanding (Focus Group). However, this caused inconsistency at Story Elementary, with some having different knowledge about the standards that did not always match the district’s vision for how the standards were to be taught and assessed. For example, Mae explained that the district walkthrough document (Appendix C) required her to have students practice reading a complex text and use academic language; however, complex text was only one of the standards in the ELA CCSS. In support, Lola explained that direct PL on how to integrate complex text did not occur until Year 2, a year later than needed (Interview 2).

In response to the needs expressed by the teachers, district leadership created a document to collect data to inform the PL during Year 1. One artifact generated by the district included data from the classroom walkthrough guide (Appendix C). This guide depicted the instructional shifts in the classroom utilizing the CCSS, including reading, writing, listening, speaking, and academic vocabulary. The district used this tool in the first year of the CCSS implementation to see how teachers were addressing shifts in their everyday instruction to meet the learning styles of their students. In the Walkthrough Guide, learning styles entailed 1) choosing tasks that intentionally helped students with academic language, 2) thinking about a text with others and using complex text, 3) integrating text-dependent questions, and 4) using evidence from the text to support thinking or answers, which may include physically going back into the text.

Lola mentioned this guide during the individual interview. She did not see the document as a guide to instruction but as a “gotchaya” by the district administration, as the district checked
on individual classrooms to make sure the teachers were implementing the standards with
tention to meet the rigorous CCSS demands (Lola, Interview 2). Although the intent of the
guide was to support teachers in “look fors” and ways they could improve daily instruction, the
top-down emotional toll that the per-semester observations had on teachers was apparent in their
responses to the guide. One teacher expressed:

The district does not understand the rigor of the standards and thus cannot support us
with them. However, we are expected to uphold the standards in our classroom
instruction on a daily basis. It is difficult to build an airplane while flying. (Jackie,
Interview 3)

Mae, without referencing the Walkthrough Guide, talked about the learning styles in one of her
bi-weekly reflections, stating that her students were involved in close reading of a text and
working on questioning skills to ask and answer questions of each other, including the need to
cite evidence in the text. Her reflection on teaching these skills to her students proved to be
useful in meeting the standards. However, Mae felt it supported her students by becoming
“active participants in discussions and taught them to cite evidence from an academic text, which
is so much more than a standard to be met. It is a life skill” (Mae, Bi-Weekly Reflection).

From the onset of the reform initiative during the 2011-2012 academic year, the teachers
involved in this study admitted they did not have a mutual understanding of the Common Core.
For example, Mae felt “there had been a lot of misunderstandings from teachers, parents, and
truly politicians about what they actually are. We [teachers] were trying to change, but [we] were
not getting the support we needed to do that” (Interview 1). This idea of misunderstanding the
standards was present in the sentiments of the other teachers as well. For instance, Jackie shared:

CCSS was an attempt to close the achievement gap in the United States and the attempt
to reach higher achievement levels like other high-performing nations. However, the
standards are so ambiguous and lack the specific vocabulary and skills needed that they
are too often misinterpreted. (Interview 1)
Like Jackie, Kate also felt the standards were very open ended and “left too much to chance. Sometimes the standards are skill based and sometimes they are performance based. Sometimes they are taught in multiple grade levels. How do we plan for all of that?” (Interview 1). Overall, there was a mutual feeling that using the standards to plan was a significant challenge in the eyes of the teachers because they saw the standards as ambiguous and misinterpreted.

In the view of the CCSS, “it is essential at the local level, if the standards are to be valid and consistent across teachers, that ample time is given to instruct on the ambiguity of the key verb in each standard” (Common Core State Standards, 2011, p. 5). When addressing the type of PL teachers were given to implement the standards during the first year, Lola felt a “significant amount of time was spent on how to read the standards, with PL based on the format of the domains, the clusters or anchors within the domains and the standards themselves made it difficult to plan” (Interview 2). However, Kate added a slightly different perspective to this thinking, “What students should understand and be able to do at each grade level was done in isolation through grade-level professional learning communities” (Interview 2). Thus, her interpretation of the standards was based only on grade level.

In summary, these teachers felt the PL they received during the first year of implementation lacked information about how to plan for using the standards. What they did acknowledge as beneficial was the amount of time spent learning the standards and the specific language associated with the new standards. This term-specific language was defined by Lola during a discussion about the CCSS in Interview 2. In her opinion, they were skill-based standards:

When we received PL that focused on scaffolding the learning and how to unpack the specific language in the standards, [that] supported my learning the most. I could look at a standard that had the verb “identify,” “analyze,” or “understand” and based on where
my students were performing on that skill I could decide what scaffolding was needed to help students meet the standard.

Kate expressed that based on the PL provided during Year 1 of the CCSS reform initiative, Years 2 and 3 at Story Elementary presented a growing need for intense PL focused on CCSS planning tools.

**Focus of Professional Learning - Years 2 and 3 (2012-14)**

The teachers explained that after the first year of implementation there was an increased need for high-quality PL related to the standards. To substantiate this theme, a total of 69 comments were extracted from Interviews 1, 2, and 3; the focus group; the bi-weekly reflections; and the instructional artifacts. Lola began by explaining that after the curriculum frameworks were created, another team of district teachers was configured. The District Literacy Leadership Team (DLLT) was comprised of a select group of teachers, administrators, reading specialists, and ISCs who started their work in 2012 and continued into 2013. During this time, the DLLT received PL focused on three shifts: 1) building knowledge through context-rich non-fiction; 2) reading, writing, listening, and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational; and 3) practicing regularly with complex texts and associated academic language (Appendix C). The three shifts were dictated by district administration to strengthen the knowledge base of the DLLT and to promote the transfer of these shifts into the district elementary schools. Lola was fortunate to be part of the DLLT, so she shared the agendas of the four PL meetings that occurred in October and November 2012 as well as January and February 2013. One outcome of the meetings stated, “Develop knowledge and understanding about the structure and application of ELA CCSS and build capacity for the implementation of ELA
Common Core using strategic and informed choices to address the shifts in practice” (meeting agenda, November 8, 2012). Lola explained:

The PL during the DLLT meeting for this outcome was looking at data and making informed instructional decisions based on the data. My team of teachers that I worked with on the DLLT focused on the literacy standards and looking at what standard we needed to teach in guided reading groups based on the reading data that we analyzed. (Interview 3)

The type of capacity building that occurred at the DLLT was not transferred as PL to teachers who were not part of the DLLT. Kate shared that the PL that occurred in the building was “surface-level learning on the standards themselves and did not help teach the standards in my classroom to my students” (Interview 2). In extending this thought, Lola added:

PL in the past has been purposeful in building the capacity of all teachers as we address complex questions and challenges related to new ideas and new strategies. It is difficult to understand that when we are focusing on implementing new standards for teaching that the PL is not focused on this. (Interview 3)

Although the agendas shared from the DLLT had outcomes to address the needs of teachers using the standards in the classroom, the transfer from this team’s learning to the district-level teachers was not always clear and concise. Even with the change in focus, the teachers felt the PL did not center on building capacity for the standards or for using them to plan for instruction. Dale Carnegie once stated, “Knowledge isn’t power until it is applied,” and following this idea, although the teachers went to and sat through the training for the newly adopted CCSS, they collectively felt the training was inadequate (Lola, Mae, Jackie, Kate, Focus Group), which created a gap in their knowing and doing. Lola expressed:

Time was spent in the District Literacy Leadership Team talking about how to bring the learning back to the teachers in individual buildings, but it was just talking, no plan was adopted, so it was up to leadership to determine what the next steps were. (Focus Group)
Mae shared in Interview 3 that the PL at Story Elementary was “more of a checking for understanding type of support for teachers. During the PL the teachers would look at the standards and identify learning goals and then plan instruction based on student needs” (Interview 1). Mae also noted that a majority of the PL at Story Elementary focused on understanding what students needed to know and be able to do to achieve the standards related to close reading and paired texts (Focus Group). Although this PL was related to the standards, Jackie shared that “spending almost every PL meeting learning about close reading procedures was overkill” (Interview 1). Kate contradicted Mae’s sentiments by adding,

This more crucial form of PL did not occur because the teachers were struggling to wrap their heads around using the new standards, but because it was something that each of us were interpreting differently. So they gave us a formula instead of explaining what it really meant in the standards. (Kate, Focus Group)

In regard to the paired text PL, Kate thought that “PL was done in the first year on paired texts” (Focus Group). This contradicted Mae’s thinking, thus making it challenging to understand when the PL for paired-text occurred during the years following CCSS adoption. However, the more important message was that paired text PL did occur at Story Elementary.

When these teachers attended the PL provided by the district and in their buildings, they explained they often felt the PL was an overview and did not go in depth (Mae, Lola, Jackie, Kate, Focus Group). Lola added that “the District Literacy Leadership Team learned early on about the standards and progressions, but it was overwhelming to think about the progressions at the building level until full understanding and implementation was occurring” (Focus Group). Kate added that although “understanding the standards was a focus in our building” (Interview 3), progression learning was not, even though progression learning was a focus of the DLLT agenda shared by Lola in her artifact contributions (Figure 1).
During the district-level PL, the teachers broke into small groups, looked at the standards for ELA, and analyzed the instructional implications for each of the standards. However, Lola shared “this type of PL was not necessarily transferred to the building level. Each building member assigned to the DLLT brought back slightly different learning to their building based on their own understanding” (Lola, Focus Group). Lola went on to explain, “I was part of the team, but I had little say in what PL was done at our building. It was mainly the building administration that determined our outcome.”

At Story Elementary, a great deal of PL was spent interpreting the language in the standards and looking at what was expected of students to help teachers identify how to meet the standards in their lessons. For example, Jackie shared, “I learned how to look at the word ‘understand’ in a standard and determine what it meant for my fifth graders and to what degree I needed them to understand the skills and content” (Interview 3). Kate also reported that during Year 2 more in-depth PL was specifically needed to address the shift of knowing how to balance fiction and non-fiction texts in the classroom. She explained:

There was a “knowing and doing gap” in the PL. We were learning all about the standards, the history behind their creation, how to read them and what we were responsible for teaching, but not how to use them in our daily instruction. I don’t remember learning about the shift of 50/50 balance of reading materials. I did that out of need, not because I was taught that in PL. (Interview 3)

This very point was also discussed during the focus group when Lola, Mae, Jackie, and Kate explained how they learned about the standards but not what to do with them. They concurred that they did not learn how to integrate the standards into their lessons across content areas (Focus Group). Jackie shared during Interview 1 that “integrating the standards was not something that was brought to our attention as a staff until the last couple of years.” Mae added that “we did not have PL on integrating the standards until the past year or so when we started to
learn about grade-level and team specialization” (Focus Group). Kate confirmed that “there was no development or guidance about specific strategies to use or how to integrate them into our lesson planning” (Interview 3).

Literacy Leadership Team
2012-2013

Goals:
- Establish a core district leadership group that is knowledgeable in the area of ELA Common Core
- Develop knowledge and understanding about the structure and application of ELA Common Core State Standards
- Build capacity for the implementation of ELA Common Core shifts in practice using strategic and informed choices
- Become familiar with information from PARCC (assessment and support)
- Collaborate with colleagues by processing professional learning that is shared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, October 18, 2012</td>
<td></td>
<td>4:00 pm – 7:00 pm</td>
<td>Introduction of beliefs, vision, work and members Overview of the ELA Common Core Standards and progressions · Foster clarity in what is expected of students each year K-12 · Analyze the instructional implications of the language of the CCSS for ELA · Develop an understanding of the similarities and differences between ELA and Disciplinary Literacy Standards for Reading and Writing · Analyze/Compare the instructional implications of the integrated nature of the CCSS for ELA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. DLLT agenda.
As Mae stated, “We assumed that the district would provide us with the PL that we needed and the outcomes looked great on paper, but in reality the PL did not support us in the classroom to create lessons that mirrored the CCSS and, more importantly, supported students” (Focus Group). Mae identified that she needed strategies and tools on how to use the new knowledge in her classroom (Focus Group), and Lola added that “specific reading strategies to teach some of the standards that were new and challenging to students would have been great PL” (Focus group). They felt this learning would have had deeper implications for instruction in the classroom.

One of the artifacts shared by Mae was a district Institute Day agenda on which time had been allotted for the teachers to share their learning about paired text as a grade-level team. Mae noted, “We were asked to share the work that we had been doing as a building on paired text and share sample paired-text sets” (Interview 3). Kate added, “Other buildings may have had PL on paired text, but we did not. How could we share what we didn’t have” (Focus Group). During this district sharing opportunity, Story Elementary teachers did not feel confident in their knowledge of paired texts (Mae and Lola, Focus Group). Story Elementary teachers shared that other teachers were comfortable in sharing and seemed to be learning from the sharing experience, “but it was difficult to enter into a conversation that I knew little about” (Kate, Focus Group). The district sharing opportunities were consistent on Institute Days, during which all elementary teachers received the same PL and teachers were grouped together with like grade levels to share successes and challenges with the CCSS. However, Story Elementary teachers were not able to fully participate in sharing paired-text strategies and discussions surrounding this idea because they did not have sufficient learning on the subject at the building level. Although Story Elementary teachers reported not feeling comfortable with the discussion, Mae
and Jackie both shared that they did gather paired-text sample sets for their use in the classroom. “I may have gone into the Institute Day frustrated and uncomfortable, but third-grade teachers shared a document that they created that had good small-group reading paired texts, so it was not a total loss” (Focus Group). Like Mae, Jackie also shared a take-away from the Institute Day: “The ISC that was facilitating helped me understand where paired texts fit into my instruction, but better yet, I left with a lesson for the unit I was going to teach” (Focus Group). Mae shared the agenda from the February 28, 2014, Institute Day that was designed to help teachers focus on paired texts and the subsequent instructional unit the teams would be teaching (Figure 2).

Institute Day- February 28, 2014- ELA 3-5

Outcomes:

- Understand what students need to know and be able to do to achieve standards
- Understand what shifts in instruction need to occur
- Design instruction for upcoming units
- Grow and learn as a unit district among colleagues from varied backgrounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8:00-8:20</th>
<th>12:30-12:50</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Norms</strong></td>
<td><strong>Outcomes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Agenda</strong></td>
<td><strong>Agenda</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share survey data and purpose of “institute day”</td>
<td>Share survey data and purpose of “institute day”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Responding to teacher needs: focused time on units, time with PLC, providing choice based on needs)</td>
<td>(Responding to teacher needs: focused time on units, time with PLC, providing choice based on needs)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honor the responses and share options for topics that were not the most popular and preview that parts of the paired text work will address the other categories</td>
<td>Honor the responses and share options for topics that were not the most popular and preview that parts of the paired text work will address the other categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Sit in groups of 5 that include: 1 specialist, representatives from 3 different buildings and all classroom teachers from the same grade level.)</td>
<td>(Sit in groups of 5 that include: 1 specialist, representatives from 3 different buildings and all classroom teachers from the same grade level.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Districtwide Institute Day agenda. Continued on following page.
8:20-9:40   Paired Text Professional Learning:
Share purpose of the mixed group sharing: We are a community of learners who are all at different points along the journey. This time is to start to see the paths that others have taken. Later, we will follow one group’s journey through multiple years of learning.

10 min. - In what ways have you used paired text? Share examples colleagues brought from their classrooms

5 min. WHAT - Hand out and explain what it is. May be useful during our planning time today or when back at buildings to plan.
Share summary of background excerpts from Professional Resource: Passage Selection Guidelines for Assessing CCSS ELA

Return to grade level PLCs
HOW
- 20 min. - Read: Professional Resource: Expanding Comprehension
  ○ Individually jot down notes on handout: What do I notice? What do I wonder? What’s my plan?
- 40 min. - Share video of FR teachers talking about their work
  ○ Show 5th grade:
    ■ individually take notes on handout (8 min.)
    ■ discussion
  ○ Show 4th grade
    ■ individually take notes on handout
    ■ discussion
  ○ Show 3rd grade
    ■ individually take notes on handout
    ■ discussion
- Show student video
- Refer to posters of “collecting information”
- Reiterate the point: Literacy skills put into a meaningful context- not teaching a theme- using the theme as the context for the learning and building background

10 min. WHY - Table discussion based on slide question

9:40-9:55 9:55-11:00
2:10-2:25 2:25-3:30
PLC - Looking at Unit 5 through backward planning - What do they need to know and how might we teach it?
- Review slide from previous institute day with a flowchart
- Give 5th-grade example from unit 5 summative: think aloud:
  ○ Walk through the template “Common Core-Aligned Instruction for Literacy”

In grade-level PLCs:
HANDOUT AND FILL OUT EXIT SLIP DURING THIS TIME!
- Look at Unit 5 Assessments and Learning Targets
- PLCs choose one summative task to analyze
- Use Common Core-Aligned Instruction for Literacy Template
The focus of the PL was on shared examples of paired texts and “using literacy skills in a meaningful context – not teaching a theme – using the theme as the context for the learning and building background” (see Figure 2). When asked what this PL looked like, none of the teachers could remember specifics about the training, but they did remember how they felt about the experience. For example, Mae shared:

The PL was generalized with reading professional articles and other teachers in the district sharing what paired texts they used, but once again we needed strategies that tied the paired texts together and more importantly we needed the resources for the paired texts. (Interview 3)

Similar to Mae, Kate added that she searched the internet for appropriate paired texts for fifth grade (Interview 3). Like Mae and Kate, Jackie also struggled to find appropriate resources to plan using paired texts but relied on “trial by error” to find resources and strategies to teach from the texts. Jackie expanded the idea by saying, “Finding texts was not as big of a problem as connecting the texts to the standards…teaching reading strategies that aligned to the standards was the biggest issue” (Interview 3). This thinking was also apparent in the bi-weekly reflection shared by Mae:

I used two different articles about healthy eating, one from *Time for Kids* and one from ReadWorks. The students had to closely read and find key ideas in each article and then compare and contrast the information in each. (Bi-Weekly Reflection)

These teachers knew they needed to plan integrated and productive lessons utilizing the new standards, but actually putting them into action proved challenging.

**Using the Standards to Plan Productively**

A total of 188 comments were shared by the teachers that revealed their use of the standards to plan productively led to not only a gap in understanding but also how to integrate
learning across the curriculum with an equal balance of literary and informational texts. That is, the teachers reported a gap between knowing what to do and how to do it. For example, Lola explained:

There was a buzz about the standards amongst teachers, but we did not really realize what changes would actually have to take place when full implementation happened. I thought that the standards would be the same as past Illinois Standards. (Interview 3)

Kate went on to explain, “Planning was done within our team, but we basically did what we had always done because we did not know how to use the standards” (Interview 2). Jackie felt that the standards were used by the teachers during planning but noted the “interpretation of each of the standards was different” (Focus Group). Mae added to Jackie’s thinking by sharing an example to confirm this point: “The standards use words like “recognize,” “analyze,” [and] “understand.” What does that look like for a third grader? How do I plan for my outcomes?” (Focus Group). The teachers realized that if they did not understand the standards and what they looked like at each grade level, it would be difficult to evaluate student learning.

The teachers reported they needed more PL specifically focused on instructional planning to bridge the knowing and doing gap. For example, Kate expressed that the CCSS for ELA provided exemplary texts for her to use during direct instruction. She was not worried about balancing what she was using to teach; instead, she focused on what students were reading. Kate went on to explain that “this was difficult to plan for since most of the reading that fifth graders were doing was independently selected” (Interview 3), and students were expected to independently apply the skills learned in earlier grades to their own more challenging books. Kate’s example demonstrated a gap between knowing the standards and planning to assist student-readers in deeper comprehension of independently selected texts. Another example came from Mae, who described how anchor standards were a challenge in and of themselves because
“each standard was delineated for fiction, informational, reading foundational skills, listening and speaking, and writing. The pure amount [of planning] was daunting” (Interview 1). Similar to Mae, Lola described the challenges associated with using the standards to plan productively. She pointed out that the standards have domains, then anchor standards, and finally clusters of standards.

The standards have domains that are large groups of related standards, ten anchors which are groups of related standards, and then the clusters which are standards inside the domains that really define what students should understand and be able to do at each grade level. (Lola, Interview 1)

Additionally, under some of the anchor standards, there are substandards (e.g., R.F.3.1a and R.F.3.1b): “The volume of standards that we have to teach [and plan] for each quarter is challenging” (Lola, Interview 1). Moreover, Lola, Mae, and Jackie shared that the teachers’ ability to plan productively was complicated because many standards required new or substantially revised materials and lessons (Interviews 3). As such, this created a considerable impact on their everyday planning and practice (Interview 2). For example, Jackie shared, that “I had to find my own materials. I couldn’t use the books or content area material from previous years” (Interview 1). Like Jackie, Lola added, “I spent countless hours searching for primary sources and complex texts” (Interview 1). Lola did not mention the change in materials that she needed to instruct, but she did comment on shifting away from lesson planning to lesson mapping. I mapped out my week instead of planning daily lessons. I would look at the standards and try and figure out how I was going to teach all of them throughout my fiction unit. I used to plan day by day, but I can’t do that with the CCSS. (Interview 1)

Along with the need to develop new resources, the teachers also reported that the standards restricted their creativity (Jackie, Interview 1) and the instructional strategies they were able to utilize in the classroom (Lola, Interview 1), thus making teachers feel less productive
(Kate, Interview 1). With all of the changes in everyday practices and procedures, Kate reported feeling “less competent in choosing the materials for instruction and feeling less self-efficacious about her practice (Focus Group).

From this major theme – helping teachers plan productively to use the new standards – four subthemes emerged: 1) change to an outcomes focus and volume of standards, 2) prioritize standards, 3) align the CCSS to other content taught, and 4) deal with the effects of the CCSS learning progressions on accountability measures. A description of each subtheme follows.

Change to an Outcomes Focus and in Volume of Standards

Changes in expectations from the old Illinois State Standards to the CCSS posed a significant shift for these teachers. To substantiate this claim, 31 total comments were extracted from Interviews 2 and 3, the focus group, and the instructional artifacts. Jackie and Mae, for instance, agreed that the past Illinois Standards focused on strategies for learning, whereas the CCSS focused on learning outcomes. To clarify their point, Jackie and Mae shared examples of both sets of standards, in particular reading at the early and late elementary levels. They started with the former Illinois Learning Standards:

- Continuously check and clarify for understanding (e.g., reread, read ahead, use visual and context clues, ask questions, retell, use meaningful substitutions) (early elementary)
- Continuously check and clarify for understanding (e.g., in addition to previous skills, clarify terminology, seek additional information) (late elementary) (ISBE, 1997)

They followed with a CCSS example to demonstrate the shift away from skill development to that of learning outcomes. The example, taken from third grade, brings attention to the fact the CCSS separate informational and fictional reading:
Key Ideas and Details
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.3.1. Ask and answer questions to demonstrate an understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers (RI - reading *informational* text)

Key Ideas and Details
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.1: Ask and answer questions to demonstrate an understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers (RL - reading *literature* text)

Jackie and Mae emphasized that the new CCSS provided outcomes for students instead of skill strategies for success: reread, read ahead, visualize, retell (Focus Group). Mae acknowledged that she “struggle[d] to plan when…not provided strategies for learning” (Focus Group). Lola explained that she eventually become adept at identifying the standards in her lessons:

> One area that I feel our district really struggles with is having the resources available to teachers to teach the number of standards that we are responsible for. But we found ways around that just like we found ways around understanding the standards. When we could identify the verbs and what the standards were really asking of us, we could teach them. (Focus Group)

Like Lola, Jackie felt strongly about not being given ample time to understand the standards and proclaimed those thoughts in the focus group discussion: “Our district tends to try many things and not give that initiative and the people implementing it time to really understand and see if it is beneficial or not. We have over 50 standards that we are responsible for.” Mae shared a similar point, but she was more specific:

> I have 20 different standards to address in reading, 20 in writing, and don’t forget listening and speaking standards. Students are to master each standard, or they are not considered ready for college and career. That is a lot of pressure to put on a teacher. I need to define each standard and then determine how I am going to teach it. That is the only way I can understand the standards. (Interview2)

> One example given in the bi-weekly reflections related to Common Core Standard W.5.8: “Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, and provide a
list of sources” (Common Core State Standards, 2010, p. 21). Jackie shared that although this standard is long and daunting, when she looked at what skills students were expected to master and what product(s) they were to come away with, she came to realize it was manageable.

I look at W.5.8 and see that the skills that students need to know and be able to do are the ability to gather relevant information from multiple sources through learning to paraphrase the information, determine the credibility of each source and cite the source. The product they create is through research. (Jackie, Bi-Weekly Reflection)

For this standard, Jackie designed a lesson in which she asked her students to produce Cornell notes from several teacher-selected websites as well as print resources loaded onto Google Classroom that pertained to this inquiry question: “Should we celebrate Columbus Day?” Then the students were to summarize their information and share their thinking with a partner (Bi-weekly reflection). In planning and delivering her lesson to meet CCSS W.5.8, Jackie found that breaking down the standards into skills and focusing on the academic language she wanted the students to know and be able to do made the standards easier to implement.

Finally, the language in the standards was new, as was the expectation for students to “master” them to be “college and career ready” (Lola, Focus Group). Mae emphasized that the phrase “college and career ready” did not just mean college ready. She described that the standards set students up to be active participants in life (Mae, Interview 3 and Bi-Weekly Reflection). “Not all students will attend college or will want to go to college, but yet students are forced to be on that track” (Mae, Interview 3). When Mae mentioned this idea during the focus group, Jackie added:

We need to focus not on the standards themselves but on what are the learning styles that come from the standards. What are the life skills that all students, college and career ready or not, will benefit from? If we focus on those, we will be teaching citizenship skills. (Jackie, Focus Group)
Although the teachers felt the standards were challenging due to being outcomes focused and larger in number, it was determined that breaking the standards into manageable constructs supported the teachers in prioritizing the standards to plan instruction.

**Prioritize Standards**

The CCSS are designed to cause in-depth inquiry, discussion, and learning (Common Core State Standards, 2012), but when a lack of understanding or the sheer amount of standards causes teachers to jeopardize their instruction, something needs to change (Accountability Works, 2012). All four teachers noted that when picking and choosing what standards to teach, they ran the risk of teaching only part of the intended standards. “I taught to the standards, but there are so many parts to each standard that I often did not meet the standard in its entirety” (Kate, Interview 3). Jackie added to this point, saying:

> I choose what standards to teach, depending on what my focus was, but often the standard had choices in what type of text to use. I typically chose stories in literacy, but I know now that I need to use poetry more. (Focus Group)

Much like Kate and Jackie, Lola and Mae also shared how they chose standards. “Especially in literacy, I ended up picking standards that my students had not mastered” (Lola, Interview 2). “I tried to prioritize the standards that felt my students needed” (Mae, Focus Group). Consequently, the teachers reported they needed to prioritize standards, defined by them as instruction addressing grade-specific standards in tandem with the broader goals of college and career readiness. To substantiate this subtheme, a total 37 comments were extracted from Interviews 1, 2, and 3 and the focus group.

The teachers felt that the administration was pushing them to prioritize standards in daily lessons and within units to focus on the “big ideas” (Lola, Mae, and Jackie, Focus Group).
Jackie, for example, explained her feeling that “the number of standards that we need to teach and have students master so they can be college and career ready is too much for teachers and way too much for students to handle” (Interview 1), so she had to prioritize. Mae supported Jackie’s thinking when she expressed “specific standards had to be prioritized in order to fit in all of the skills needed for them to be ready for fourth grade” (Interview 2). Although these teachers felt that the standards were their “burden to hold” (Lola, Interview 1) and they took it upon themselves to work collaboratively with their grade-level team to plan lessons using the CCSS, the challenge to prioritize standards felt overwhelming for them. For instance, Lola (Interview 2) explained that instructional planning focused on the verbs and how to determine what was developmentally appropriate for the students in a given grade level, but she also felt that learning how to prioritize standards needed to be done across grade levels:

> I am responsible for preparing them to move from grade to grade. I am prepping them with the skills they need to be successful in third grade. I need to know what standards were prioritized in second and what standards they prioritize in fourth so that I can meet each of my students where they are in their skill level. (Lola, Interview 2)

Like Lola, Mae also shared the need to prioritize standards, but she also felt this was up to the teacher based on what the students needed. “I teach to my students, not just to the standards. So, I understand that prioritizing is important, but it is hard for me. I prioritize reading and writing” (Mae, Focus Group).

Moreover, since the CCSS ELA and math standards were new, the teachers found themselves prioritizing these subjects over the social studies and science curriculum. They also prioritized the ELA standards based on developmental appropriateness and teacher comfort level with the standards. For instance, Lola expressed that at the beginning of the implementation
phase, she focused on the standards students needed to be successful in third and fourth grades, mainly the reading and writing standards:

Luckily several standards-based skills in third, fourth and fifth grade overlap. We have the opportunity to support our students to love reading and writing in elementary school, but in order to do this we need to make sure they can read and write. We need to focus on prioritizing the standards that accomplish this task. (Lola, Interview 2)

When it came to developmental appropriateness and prioritizing the standards taught, Mae shared:

I felt that I know the standards for my grade level, but I also have to think about what is developmentally appropriate and what can my students handle. What is the best way to reach my students? This is part of the teacher’s craft that no matter what set of standards we are teaching is never going to be professionally developed. It would have been nice if the CCSS was presented in a way that teachers could understand how they could best use them to plan purposeful instruction and address them in a timely fashion. I don’t have enough time in my day to teach all of the standards and still address other curriculum needs. (Focus Group)

Mae felt that looking at the standards and prioritizing them based on their appropriateness for her students and in a sequential manner that would benefit her instruction was the best way to use the CCSS. She chose to spend her time focused on the standards her students needed. This same thinking was shared by Jackie: “Teachers know that certain standards are more important than others for students to learn at certain grade levels, so priority is put on teaching those particular standards” (Interview 3). The teachers felt that spending so much time understanding the new standards and prioritizing the standards into manageable chunks of instruction meant that less time was available for studying other areas. From the teachers’ perspectives, prioritizing standards meant they “need[ed] to choose standards that are the most essential for students in each content area” (Mae, Interview 3). However, Lola refuted Mae’s description by saying, “It is impossible to prioritize the standards in all content areas because we are accountable for all the grade-level standards. We should not be assessing to mastery. That is how we prioritize” (Focus
Group). Lola felt that the content-area standards were secondary to the reading and writing standards. She believed that students in elementary school need to be able to read and write, thus making the content standards less imperative to the instructional day and mastery of skills.

Prioritizing the standards and determining what standards were needed for the next grade seemed to be an effective planning technique for most of these teachers. In this vein, Jackie added that she learned how to prioritize standards by looking at the concepts of readiness, endurance, and leverage in a class she took through Learners Edge. Mae also confirmed this thinking when she explained, “Readiness is about looking at what the students are able to do. Endurance is looking at what students need to be successful in the next grade and leverage is across content” (Focus Group). During the focus group, Jackie added to the concept of leveraging when she described how she integrated the content standards into literacy because she could not fit all the standards in for each quarter. “I did it out of need, not because I was told to” (Jackie, Interview 2). They all explained that the concept of leveraging was never part of the PL the teachers received (nor was readiness or endurance). In extending this line of discussion during the focus group, Mae added to Jackie’s point by describing an example of how she prioritized the standards rather than eliminating other standards. She integrated the prioritized standards into science and social studies content, mostly during the read-aloud for students, citing the book *A Different Pond* as an example. She explained, “I used the book as a mentor text in a literacy unit on character to support how character traits, motivation, or feelings explain the events in the story” (Mae, Bi-Weekly Reflection). In this case, the events focused on immigration from the point of view of a Vietnamese family. Mae purposely chose this book because it incorporated literacy and social studies standards by representing multiple points of
view around the larger topic of immigration. This thinking generated the next subtheme of aligning the CCSS standards to other content areas during the elementary day.

**Align the CCSS to Other Content Taught**

The teachers defined this theme as students becoming proficient in reading complex texts independently in a variety of content areas. A total of 32 comments were extracted from Interviews 2 and 3, the focus group, and the bi-weekly reflections to substantiate this subtheme. The data revealed the teachers began including content-area literature into the standards as a result of prioritization. For example, Mae voiced how during a biography unit in reading and an informational research unit in writing, she incorporated social studies content regarding immigration and geography (Focus Group). She felt “the use of trade books and articles as mentor texts provide[d] background on immigration and support[ed] student research on their biography reports [which were] a very natural fit” (Focus Group). Mae’s comment invited the other teachers to consider their instructional practices and draw attention to past practices. So Jackie continued the conversation by adding her own thinking about combining science and ELA standards:

I wanted my students to understand through inquiry that environmental and biological conditions lead to the transmission and prevention of diseases, but I also wanted my students to understand that when reading informational texts, it is important to draw information from multiple sources. The outcome was to write a public service announcement that includes reasons supported by evidence. (Focus Group)

Like Jackie, Kate also felt that integrating content-area standards into the CCSS was crucial. However, Kate interpreted the integration of standards on a broader scale by posing the question, “How can you teach a content area without reading or writing?” (Focus Group). All of the teachers were in agreement, and their conversation erupted into multiple examples of how they
naturally integrated the CCSS into their daily instruction. One example shared by Kate was in her science curriculum essential question about why different animals live in different places. She integrated non-fiction texts into the research of this inquiry. Like Kate, Mae also had a larger overarching question that allowed for multiple interpretations and multiple standards to be brought into the instruction. Mae integrated the standards in her history unit on how communities change over time. None of the teachers expressed that this was something out of the ordinary.

The way the teachers explained how they integrated their standards within content areas were also in alignment with the bi-weekly reflections they shared. For example, Jackie and Kate both referenced how they linked their social studies content focused on Christopher Columbus to the major ELA standards through close reading of complex texts. Jackie explained this approach in detail: “We focused on the social studies standards today while we closely read articles on Google Classroom. We did a brainstorm and an affinity to determine common themes in our Columbus articles” (Bi-Weekly Reflection). Pursuing this idea further, Kate added:

Today was a day for exploring geography and changes to the world maps from the times of Christopher Columbus. Students were continuing a map challenge we started the day before and reading and interpreting text features in the articles to take more control of their learning. (Bi-Weekly Reflection)

The teachers used various strategies to motivate their students. Some of the strategies that the teachers specifically spoke about beyond close reading and interpreting text features were student agency and goal setting. Kate purposely provided student agency in her instruction by giving students choice in their use of text features.

Students understand text features, but they do not always understand the connection to how they help them understand the text. By giving them choice in what text features to focus on and having them explain how the text feature supported their understanding of the Columbus article was empowering. (Kate, Bi-Weekly Reflection)
Kate also integrated ELA standards into the content area of social studies, thus showing potential for being a change agent in regard to implementation of the CCSS.

Like Kate, Mae also described how the use of goal setting with her students was a powerful strategy to integrate content into the CCSS:

My students set goals in reading and writing on an as-needed basis. As they learn to master certain reading or writing skills, and they can show me that they have accomplished the goal on the rubric, they are free to set a new goal. It challenges them to stay on top of their learning and shows them that they have the power to change. (Mae, Bi-Weekly Reflection)

Lola and Mae also described inclusion of a literacy strategy in third-grade science content on extreme weather that was being taught in conjunction with the ELA standards. “Students were highly engaged in the topic because we kept correlating it back to current events. They were forming informed opinions by looking at both sides of an argument” (Lola, Bi-Weekly Reflection). Mae added to what Lola said:

I needed to locate text/s that had a wide range of vocabulary to meet the needs of all learners for the weather unit. Also using new books so the students would not be familiar with the text was problematic in that the students wanted me to read the entire book. (Bi-Weekly Reflection)

Although the teachers demonstrated how they diligently aligned and integrated the standards into their instruction across the school day, they still struggled to see what they were doing as a successful use of the standards. “Maybe it was the constant data meetings focused on the lack of growth in the CCSS or maybe it was the PARCC scores, but it just seemed that we were not successful” (Kate, Interview 3). Like Kate, Jackie added that integrating standards was a need, but:

We didn’t know if we were doing it correctly, and our assessments didn’t show substantial growth. We never got reassurance that what we were doing was good, bad, okay or not, so I just kept doing what I was doing. (Interview 3)
A challenge associated with aligning the CCSS standards to other content areas became evident from the collected data. These teachers acknowledged that instruction typically focused on fiction because the resources were readily available in their classrooms, book rooms, and library. However, they noted it was difficult to plan productive lessons when the resources were not readily available. Mae explained, “The standards should be integrated with multiple genres, but the lack of resources became a problem” (Focus Group). Lola added, “We typically spent a greater amount of instructional time in fiction, but with Common Core, we had to add more informational texts to our classroom libraries and book rooms” (Interview 3). Kate agreed: “My students typically read stories and fantasy. I had to find informational texts at their level, and then it was a crapshoot if they were interested in them or not” (Focus Group). These teachers grappled with having available resources to plan instruction and expressed how they often had to find materials on their own that might, or might not, be appropriate or interesting to their students.

Although these teachers struggled to find a balance between fiction and non-fiction instructional time and materials, they soon began to incorporate both genres into their planning. In one of Kate’s bi-weekly reflections, she voiced that she purposefully planned for her students to have multiple self-selected texts in several genres for independent reading. Thus, she learned the importance of this change in her instructional planning, although it was not something she said she did at the beginning of the implementation. The concerns Kate referenced in her bi-weekly reflections were ideas that both Jackie and Lola also shared during Interview 2. Jackie referenced the CCSS as stating all students need an equal balance of fiction and non-fiction texts. She added:
I used to do more book clubs that were focused on students reading about content, but the CCSS have made me more aware to have students read informational texts when we are learning informational strategies and likewise with fiction. They can carry the skills over to their own texts. (Interview 2)

Like Jackie, Lola explained that she purposefully plans for “students to have a minimum of five of each genre in their reading bags to expose them to multiple forms of text” (Interview 2). Their reasons for balancing text genres in their instruction were derived from the CCSS. As they became more familiar with the standards, the teachers indicated the standards made them more aware of how to plan for exposure to multiple genres across the curriculum. As their PL needs decreased from learning how to plan using the standards and shifted to differentiating instruction for students utilizing learning progressions, a new subtheme unfolded.

Dealing with Effects of CCSS Learning Progressions on Accountability Measures

As the teachers’ understanding of the CCSS learning progressions developed, it led to an awareness that they needed to make more informed instructional decisions and facilitate better alignment to assessments. Popham (2007) defines learning progressions as a “carefully sequenced set of building blocks that students must master en route to a more distant curricular aim. The building blocks consist of subskills and bodies of enabling knowledge” (p.184). During the CCSS reform initiative, these teachers grew to realize the need for understanding the learning progressions across grade levels. A total of 33 comments were extracted from Interviews 1, 2, and 3 and the focus group to substantiate this subtheme. For example, during Interviews 1 and 3, Lola described a challenge in using the CCSS in her planning because of the constant need to fill in gaps from previous grades. She explained that “the CCSS start in kindergarten, so the work and the learning they do in future grades make them college and career ready. However, what
they don’t master in the previous grade we need to address” (Interview 1) and “it feels that third grade has way more standards to cover in relation to other grades” (Interview 3). During the focus group, the teachers discussed how exposure to the standards during the first year of implementation was challenging because the students had not experienced the CCSS expectations in previous grades.

We never got to the geometry standards in math, and in talking with other grade teams, they never did either. This is a problem. If second grade never got to geometry and third didn’t either, they have lost two years of instruction. Students are already behind in fourth grade and who knows if fourth grade ever gets to it. Geometry is always the last unit in math. (Mae, Focus Group)

With some standards being skipped due to lack of instructional time, coupled with the challenge of learning new standards, these teachers felt pressure to teach grade-level-appropriate standards. Mae stated:

Students and, honestly, teachers were behind the eight ball when we first started with the CCSS. Students did not know the language or have the background of the previous grade standards to be successful in the current grade-level standards. (Focus Group)

Mae’s sentiments were shared by Lola, who added, “We were teaching multiple grade-level standards, which is why the progressions helped organize our teaching” (Focus Group). Jackie extended Lola’s point: “The progressions were like a map of where students had been and where they needed to go” (Interview 1). Mae also built on this idea: “The standards say ‘quote accurately’ or ‘determine the main idea’ but do not tell you when they should be able to do this on their own. That is up to the teacher, and the progressions help guide my teaching” (Focus group).

Mae and Lola reported that when the teachers at Story Elementary understood the learning progressions, it led to more informed instructional decisions that aligned to the standards and assessments (Focus Group). “I had the background from the DLLT about the
progressions so I felt that when we went deeper as a school on how to use the progressions, it helped me be a better teacher and make informed decisions” (Lola, Focus Group). Similarly, Mae added, “The learning progressions made sense and supported my learning on how to align my instruction and assessments to my daily instruction” (Focus Group). However, Kate, Lola, and Mae all defined their knowledge of learning progressions differently, including how the progressions should be used in the assessment process. For instance, Kate’s understanding was based on predictability: “The progressions are a predictability measure that teachers use to gauge the students in the classroom” (Focus Group). Kate’s understanding of progressions matches Corcoran, Mosher and Rogat’s (2009) declaration that “progressions identify the path in which students’ knowledge and skills are likely to grow and develop” (p. 9), but Kate added that the assessment has to match as well. “While the assessment tells us what a student has learned, the learning progression tells us what a student is ready to learn” (Kate, Focus Group). In contrast, Lola’s definition was more aligned with Popham’s (2007) definition of learning progressions being based on building blocks. “Learning progressions present skills that build off of each other and progressively get harder as you increase in grade level” (Lola, Focus Group). Mae’s definition drew a connection to

being more child centered and focused on students learning the content over time, but with this growth in knowledge and maturity over the years, so does the content grow. They become more capable of connecting new knowledge with previous knowledge. If we do not fill in the gaps for students along their school progressions, their ability to connect knowledge becomes more of a challenge. (Focus Group)

Because each of these teachers expressed differences in understanding learning progressions, a challenge in balancing the standards in each grade level while attending to the needs of their students to fill in academic gaps became an issue during grade-level assessments. During the focus group discussion, the teachers shared a specific example in math that caused
issues in subsequent grades. “We were always behind the standards that we were supposed to be
teaching and assessing. We were filling in gaps. I never got to geometry” (Mae, Focus Group).
Jackie echoed this notion: “I never got to geometry either. It was the last unit, and I never had
time to teach it” (Focus Group). To add to the point about what standards teachers were teaching
and assessing, Mae felt that she was trying to teach second-grade standards as well as third-grade
standards:

As a grade-level we were to assess our grade-level standards, but for many of my
students they were below the grade-level expectation, so I was teaching to the standards
on the progression, building to the grade-level standards. (Mae, Interview 3)

Although Mae was addressing the academic gaps of her students based on the learning
progression, she was also teaching her grade-level standards. “Often I was teaching second-,
third- and fourth-grade standards because that is what my students’ academic needs showed”
(Mae, Interview 3). The struggle to meet the academic needs of students and assess the standards
that needed to be taught was a challenge. While Mae balanced the standards using the
progressions, Kate struggled to use the progressions in the same way.

I was struggling to teach fifth-grade standards. I did not have time to reteach the third-
and fourth-grade standards. I guess I should have, and I think I do a better job at doing
this now, but when I first learned about the progressions, I used it as a tool to show what
students were ready to learn. I did not necessarily change my instruction in the classroom
to meet the needs of all of the students that were not meeting grade-level expectations.
(Focus Group)

Nevertheless, the positive is that each teacher had a basic understanding of the learning
progressions and used that knowledge to the best of her ability to meet the needs of her students.

For example, Kate, a fifth-grade teacher shared:

Although I think we formally assess too much, I know where each of my students is in
regard to reading, writing, and math at any given time. I understand where they are and
what I have to do to get them where they need to be. (Interview 2)
Mae followed up:

Data is not a bad word. It is not looked at anymore like something that is being done to us, but it is something that I have become accustomed to using, understanding and creating based on where my students are in relation to grade-level benchmarks. (Focus Group)

Both Kate and Mae’s statements align with Safer and Fleischmann’s (2005) description of student success: teachers must be highly adept at understanding and monitoring the progress of each student and adjusting instruction accordingly in each lesson. However, getting to this point for the teachers did not happen right away. Mae’s comment about the PL the teachers received during the CCSS reform initiative captured it best: “Although learning progressions have the ability to strengthen teachers’ ability to analyze and respond to student needs, this takes experience, time, and effort. We can’t learn this in one staff meeting and expect to see changes the next day” (Focus Group). Jackie emphasized that “as we became more adept at understanding the learning progressions, we began to transform our instruction” (Focus Group). “Along with our learning on progressions we also had to learn about the new accountability measures that were being implemented along with the CCSS” (Mae, Interview 3). With the CCSS implementation, also came the increase in assessment measures.

Increase in assessment measures and accountability was defined by these teachers as feeling the strain of the new Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessment and the pressure they felt to implement the standards with fidelity. One shift expressed by the teachers included the procedures and methods used to assess that students learned the content. Jackie shared, “We stopped instruction to do PARCC prep. We practiced taking the test paper pencil and online” (Jackie, Interview 3). All teachers described a significant increase in assessment-based measures stemming from the CCSS. Kate expressed feeling less
productive in her instructional decisions during this time because she felt she was being judged on her students’ skills during the PARCC assessment (Interview 3). Kate defined this form of assessment as a “major shift” in education (Interview 3).

In addition to the mandated assessment, in Interview 2 as well as in the collection of artifacts, the teachers referenced the prescribed district resources for teaching the CCSS (Lola, Mae, and Kate) and how this mandate often made them feel like the district did not trust their ability to teach. Lola described “how a curriculum resource was purchased that had a teaching manual aligned with the CCSS” (Lola, Interview 2). Kate also referenced the resource during Interview 2, stating that the resource had too many components and, after the first year, many teachers abandoned the resource as the district worked diligently to find or create a new curriculum map utilizing the CCSS for elementary students. Jackie expressed her frustration in the district “not letting teachers get good in one area or one resource before changing to something else” (Interview 3). Lola expressed the same notion in the focus group:

As if CCSS shifts were not enough for teachers to tackle, we were also struggling to find resources to teach the standards. Since the resource that we were given did not support the CCSS and was misaligned to my teaching philosophy, I found my own materials. I eventually abandoned the resource because it did not fit my needs. We were supposed to implement the resource with fidelity. I was only teaching words with the resource. I chose to teach from the standards instead. I felt confident that my instructional decisions would support the state testing outcomes. (Lola, Focus Group)

Lola’s thinking is shared by Murphy and Regenstein (2012) in the Fordham Report: the biggest problem with the standards themselves is that they only focus on the text. There is nothing about building knowledge, providing context, or reading classic works of literature. Mae echoed this thought:

It is hard to take the time to understand the “why” of what is being taught because we are too busy trying to figure out the “what” – what content, what standards, what materials, what assessments, what accommodations. We are working so hard to improve the
assessment results that we lose why we are really here. We lose the art of teaching real reading. (Interview 3)

Kate agreed, “Teachers are fearful of the standardized assessments and who will be held accountable for the results” (Interview 3). Although these teachers were willing to accept a certain amount of uncertainty during the process of redevelopment and reimagining of the curriculum, they noted it takes time to own the standards and make them user-friendly in the classroom setting. Lola perceived the importance of taking the time “to understand why you are teaching what you are teaching. It is the first step to help me figure out the what. If I do not do this, I don’t see myself as doing my job as a teacher” (Interview 3). As the teachers discussed the challenges to the assessments tied to the standards, they also accounted for the strengths in the standards. Jackie shared that the standards supported her understanding of how to teach non-fiction and be more knowledgeable in using non-fiction texts in her instruction (Focus Group). The teachers expressed that the CCSS helped them become more conscious of how to use the assessments to change their instruction. “PARCC was a challenging tool to use to monitor my teaching because we did not receive the results until the following year” (Kate, Interview 2). “We did base our School Improvement Goals on the results. So I guess in a roundabout way we did focus our instruction on the CCSS areas we were lacking in” (Mae, Focus group). Kate and Mae felt that the PARCC assessment was an accountability measure that was not directly related to the standard learning progressions being used to instruct. However, Lola refuted this belief by stating:

Where the learning progressions supported PARCC was in measuring the standards connected to ELA content. The Model Content Frameworks served as a bridge between CCSS and PARCC. They highlighted some of the major grade-to-grade standards in the progressions and showed us where grade levels needed to focus on building deeper knowledge and skill in each standard. The unfortunate thing was that we did not learn about the frameworks until years after we implemented the CCSS. If we would have had
the frameworks sooner, we may have understood how the assessment supported the progressions and vice versa. (Lola, Interview 2)

The disagreement between these teachers regarding the connection of learning progressions and PARCC was based on the way these teachers viewed standards-based instruction and its connection to students meeting these standards. This thinking summarizes the thoughts of the teachers as they worked through the standards during the initial years of implementation to become more accustomed to using them in their everyday instruction and assessment. Mae added, “As teachers’ understanding of the standards grew, so did that of the students. This could be felt and seen in the classroom, but it did not happen right away” (Focus Group). Jackie shared, “My students’ writing has never been stronger in all of my years of teaching. I attribute that to the CCSS” (Interview 1). Through these reflections, the teachers began to see themselves and their instruction in a more positive light, casting a positive profile on what they at first saw as the daunting CCSS.

Since implementing the CCSS, the teachers have found that the standards do provide a map of what is expected of students from grade to grade. “The progressions provide a grade-to-grade map, the standards give me my grade-level expectations, and PARCC tells me if I am aligning the progressions and standards to meet the targets for my students” (Lola, Focus Group). This relationship between standards, learning progressions, and assessment was also shared by Kate, who stated, “Without standards and progressions I wouldn’t know what to assess, so PARCC holds me and my students accountable” (Focus Group). Mae added a different view when she summarized her thinking about standards alignment and adjusting her expectations: “Each student is different and no matter what the standard, we have to adjust our teaching to match what they need. We need to adjust our expectations, whether it is Common Core aligned
or not. It is what is best for students” (Mae, Focus Group). Although these teachers did not always agree on the interconnectedness of learning progressions and assessment, these perspectives shaped how they viewed the learning that was taking place within their classrooms and how they utilized the tools (progressions and assessments) to align their instruction to meet the needs of their students.

Chapter Summary

The synthesized findings in this chapter explored the four elementary teachers’ perceptions about instructional decision making and delivery of the CCSS districtwide reform initiative. The organization of the chapter was purposely chronological to capture how the teachers experienced the three-year districtwide reform initiative. In total, there were three major themes and four subthemes that emerged from the teacher interviews, bi-weekly reflections, instructional artifacts, and focus group. Chapter 5 will answer the research questions and include a deeper discussion related to the implications, limitations, recommendations to the field, and considerations for future research.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined four elementary teachers’ perceptions of the influence CCSS had on their instructional decision making. Fullan’s change theory (2007) and Hattie’s 10 mindframes (2018) for teachers were used as the foundation for this study. The four teachers were interviewed and participated in a focus group to identify their perspectives on their implementation and instructional decision making based on the CCSS and the district’s/school’s PL that occurred to support their endeavors. Additional resources, such as bi-weekly reflections and instructional artifacts, were collected to help me understand the phenomenon.

All of the research questions in the study were sufficiently answered through the structured interviews, focus group, and bi-weekly responses provided by the teacher participants. This chapter is organized in relation to the frameworks of Fullan’s change theory and Hattie’s mindframes. Then the findings related to each framework are connected to existing research, and the implications, future research suggestions, and limitations are discussed.

Context for the Common Core Challenge

Individual state standards had been around since the early 1990s, with every state developing its own set of learning standards that specified what students in Grades 3-12 should know and be able to do by graduation. However, with these differing sets of
standards came the problem that each state had its own level of proficiency. With this lack of consistency, the need for CCSS was identified.

The CCSS were launched in 2009 by leaders from multiple states, including governors and state commissioners of education. The CCSS were created from the perceived notion that students needed to develop critical thinking skills as well as real-world learning goals, no matter where they lived, to prepare all students to be college and career ready; 46 states have adopted the standards, with 12 states repealing the standards as of 2019. Although the thinking behind the CCSS was powerful, what happened during the CCSS implementation at Story Elementary, as a representative example, was not what the CCSS developers and adopters anticipated.

This research focused on the adoption process at Story Elementary beginning with the initiation phase, moving to the implementation phase, and finally ending with the sustainability phase and how this process relates to Hattie’s mindframes. Chapter 4 included the results from this study; this chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the findings and related to existing research.

Findings Through the Lens of Fullan’s Change Theory

Fullan (2007) defines a change initiative as any reform that is intended to fundamentally alter the culture of a school and improve student learning. Fullan’s change theory has three phases: initiation, implementation, and sustainability. Each is described below with how the research questions were answered in relation to each phase.
Initiation

The CCSS reform was not a choice for teachers at Story Elementary; instead, the adoption was a statewide approach to standardizing education for all students. Since the change was initiated statewide, there were several factors that affected the Story Elementary teachers during the initiation phase. This study used Fullan’s change theory to examine the teachers’ progression.

Fullan notes that one important quality is access to the innovation, the CCSS in this study. However, from the teachers’ perspectives, they did not feel they had been provided information about the CCSS to be successful in implementing them in their classroom. Mae stated that the district administrators simply explained that the past Illinois State Standards allowed every student in the state to be learning different content and skills, but with the adoption of the CCSS, there would be more consistency across the state with fewer, clearer, and higher standards aligned with college and career expectations (Interview 3). The district’s message to the teachers was that the standards would be built on the strengths and lessons of current state standards; however, as the teachers began the initiation phase, they found that the above did not necessarily hold true. There were not fewer or clearer standards; instead, there were more rigorous standards that did not build on the past Illinois standards. The standards contained new language and necessitated new strategies for teaching the standards that required PL. As a result, all four teachers felt the support provided at Story Elementary was insufficient.

The lack of initiation by the district can be seen in the sentiments of Mae, who shared, “We would have been fine with the adoption of the CCSS if we [had] received PL that was sequenced to explain why the CC and then how to teach using the standards” (Focus Group).
Another factor of Fullan’s change theory (2011) affecting teachers during the initiation phase was teacher advocacy. The CCSS were challenging to understand and difficult for teachers to take the lead in adopting them in their classrooms; however, the external change agents, such as the DLL team and district administration, continued leading the change in the CCSS without sufficient understanding from all teachers implementing the change. This point is best captured when Mae shared:

The DLL committee had a vision and a plan for teachers in learning the CCSS, but somehow it was lost in translation. We received information second-hand and sometimes we did not follow what the district had planned in regards to the PL during staff meetings. This could have been due to the fact that Story Elementary needed something different at the time or we were providing PL that related to our SIP goals, but I feel we did not receive the PL that was or was not mapped out for us. (Interview 3)

Mae’s feeling relates to Fullan’s belief that vision without execution will not be realized over time. Although they received PL, the PL was not focused on what the teachers felt they needed to be successful. The teachers’ reflections were clear in that they needed more time and specific PL focused on the standards in the initiation phase to understand the change. These teachers shared that it was challenging to wrap their heads around the instructional shifts in the standards, not the standards themselves.

Implementing a change process is difficult, and teachers often struggle to initiate, implement, and sustain research-based reforms and initiatives (Reeves, 2009). The initiation of a change phase includes choosing a reform initiative and understanding the “forces that drive” that change within schools (Bourke & McGee, 2012). Since the initiation phase is about deciding to start the change process and how to develop the commitment toward the process, there were important keys regarding the decision to start as well as review the school’s current state in regard to the particular change (Fullan, 2007). One finding that emerged from the interviews,
focus group, and bi-weekly reflections was that if teachers do not receive effective PL from the 
onset (i.e., initiation phase), then the other phases are challenging to accomplish. The goal of any 
change is sustainability, yet sustainability will not occur if the change has not been successfully 
initiated and fully implemented. Each phase depends on the prior phase’s success and requires 
different PL strategies.

The part of the initiation phase that was lacking was a well-structured approach by the 
district in initiating the change. As referenced by the ISBE (2011) Instructional Mandates Task 
Force Report, several factors (i.e., vision, action plan, professional learning, purchasing 
instructional supplies, and gaining additional technology supports) should be considered when 
implementing a curricular change at the school level. The items referenced by ISBE are similar 
to the recommendations made by Fullan (2007) to address the complexity of helping teachers 
make needed changes during the implementation. Teachers at Story Elementary required an 
action plan and a vision for the CCSS initiative (initiation phase) but lacked support in having 
this available during implementation. In fact, during the implementation phase, lack of resources 
and PL that centered on the needs of teachers at Story Elementary created a disequilibrium in the 
intended outcomes of the change to what was actually occurring. With a faulty initiation phase, 
the other phases, implementation and sustainability, were destined to be a challenge for teachers 
as they tried their best to design lessons that impacted student learning.

**Implementation**

After the initiation phase of replacing existing state standards with the CCSS, states and 
local districts began implementing the standards in classrooms around the United States 
according to their own timelines. Illinois adopted the CCSS in 2010 with the expectation that full
implementation would occur in the 2013-2014 school year. The CCSS did not provide an implementation scope and sequence. This was to be determined by each school district implementing the new standards. With the inconsistency in the way that school districts rolled out the implementation, the common experience the CCSS anticipated began to be lost in the translation by each and every school district that adopted the CCSS (Polikoff, 2012).

In looking at the implementation phase through the lens of Fullan’s change theory, it is critical to understand the organization of the plan to make sure the specifics of the plan are fulfilled during the change initiative (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). Although Fullan advocates for a top-down approach to start the initiation, it has to be followed up by support from teachers. In this case, the top-down approach started with the state adoption of the CCSS and then the district administration leading the change. Unfortunately, after the adoption of the CCSS, only a few teachers were part of the support system to move into the implementation phase. This was the Literacy Leadership Team initiated by the district. Because only a select group of school district employees were part of the implementation, the teachers experienced “a learning by doing initiative instead of a detailed action plan” (Mae, Interview 2). Since, the PL was not as well defined as the teachers expected, their instructional decision making changed due to the lack of succinct implementation strategies and plans addressed at the district level. With the implementation phase challenged from the beginning, the sustainability of the reform was met with opposition.

This is what the teachers were experiencing when they realized there seemed to be no plan to “align curriculum, instruction, assessment, and professional development” for the teachers who were experiencing these components day after day (Jackie, Interview 1). Teachers were realizing that “we can’t have one component [curriculum, instruction, assessment, or PL]
without the other, or one professionally developed without the other” (Jackie, Interview 1). Teacher frustration regarding the CCSS reform taken from the interviews and focus group focused mainly on the lack of PL. However, the teachers were committed to student success and to the success of their instruction. “I taught myself how to use the standards. I read and talked to other colleagues and collaborated until I could take it back to my students and feel successful with my instructional practices” (Mae, Focus Group).

The important activities occurring during the implementation phase should be the actual fulfillment of the action plans, sustaining the action plans, and checking progress and/or overcoming problems (Fullan, 2007). This is the phase that Story Elementary struggled to maintain. There did not seem to be adequate or sustainable PL or training for teachers to implement the change. Kate shared that the main PL at the building level was focused on close reading. However, this learning did not overlap with what learning was occurring at district meetings (Focus Group). It seemed that pieces of the implementation were missing and it appeared, through the interview and focus group responses, that the teachers involved did not have a clear understanding of the change initiative. Thus failure occurred in that the strategy lacked a focus on what needed to change in instructional practices and what specific changes needed to take place to bring about these changes in classrooms. In the interviews, for example, Jackie’s thinking aligned with the implementation phase of Fullan’s change theory (2007): “I can embrace change if I understand why the change is occurring and I feel supported along the way. But when I’m not clear on what part of my instruction has to change, it is frustrating” (Interview 1). The PL at the building level did not match the initiatives of the district level (Kate, Focus Group).
Along with this important component of the implementation phase, another part of the process is what Fullan (2007) describes as cross-hierarchical work and relations. This component of the implementation phase empowers both teachers and the school to successfully carry out the plan. In regard to the CCSS reform initiative at Story Elementary, teachers reported that the lack of resources, classroom support, and clear direction halted the progress of implementation. Although the district promoted collaboration during some SIP days, focused on the sharing of resources and strategies, Story Elementary teachers reported that this was not meeting their needs as implementers of the CCSS because they were focusing on separate learning about the CCSS in their PL meetings. Since, the implementation phase is truly about a shared responsibility among all stakeholders, the “control” over CCSS implementation should have been a shared process, according to the teachers interviewed. This can be seen in the statements by Mae and Lola during the focus group. They shared that it sometimes felt that the district was not communicating with the building leadership on changes that needed to be happening in the building,” yet those changes were expected to occur anyway” (Mae, Focus Group). Lola connected to Mae’s sentiments by adding that “the building leadership team made decisions for us based on our needs” (Lola, Focus Group). These sentiments are what made the implementation of the CCSS challenging since the leadership at the district and building levels were not always on the same page, which filtered down to the teachers feeling the stress and strain of not seeing the connection of the PL to their classroom instruction.

Fullan (2007) believes that leaders (district administrations) at the top need to cultivate the use of change knowledge and have a clear direction based on the action plan created in the initiation phase. Without this direction, teachers are left scrambling to implement something without clear direction. In this study, some teachers had access to the plan (i.e., DLLT) while
others were left to figure out how to implement the CCSS in their classrooms as it unfolded. “As a classroom teacher, I often found out what PL we were focusing on that day” (Jackie, Interview 2). Since only one member of the interviewed teachers was part of the DLLT, other teachers felt that they did not know what the scope and sequence of the PL was for the building, let alone for the district. Overall, the four teachers who participated in this study from Story Elementary felt pressure to implement the CCSS in their classrooms without clear direction, which caused a breakdown in the change process.

With the lack of curriculum resources and PL about how to use the standards to plan productively, the teachers felt pressured to research and learn on their own according to the point of view of the teachers interviewed. Repeatedly, Kate referred to the PL she received in the building as “sparse” (Interviews 1 and 2). This was reiterated by Mae; she shared that she did her own PL through reading books and articles. Additionally, she was not interested in taking the district courses because they often focused on general effective instructional practices and not shifts in instruction related to the CCSS (Focus Group). Several researchers argue that teachers are the instruments of new knowledge and change, and this can only be accomplished through PL (Fullan with Stiegelbauer, 1991; Rosenholtz, 1989; Tikunoff & Ward, 1983). As part of Fullan’s change theory, the implementation phase can only occur with strategic, planned, and purposeful PL. As teachers adapt to new standards, they also have to be able to access effective teaching strategies. They need time to process and integrate new information from the PL so they can apply it to support student learning (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). This was not always the case at Story Elementary or in the PL.

Due to the fact that education reforms are prevalent in education and have been for many years, teachers are accustomed to the word “change.” However, it becomes challenging for
teachers to stay focused on the change when the reform is not given adequate time and energy by the leaders in charge of implementing the reform. Past research states that unless other conditions are present - including capacity building, resources, peer and leadership support - reforms struggle to make the impact intended (Rentner, Kober, & Frizzell, 2016). Fullan (2009) supports the notion that “there was actually great pressure and incentives to becoming innovative, and this resulted in many schools adopting reforms for which they did not have the capacity to put into practice” (p. 103). Unfortunately, like many of the reforms of the past, CCSS at Story Elementary could be put into this category. The teachers expressed that their instructional decisions were not built on the capacity building that they received from PL, but based mainly on their own motivation to learn and instruct the CCSS to the best of their ability. This created a challenge when PL was not extended past the first couple of years of CCSS implementation, and the teachers were left to their practice on their own.

When the teachers were implementing the CCSS, district leaders should have provided what early stage implementation looks like, what mid-stage practices are, and what full implementation is (Fullan & Levin, 2008). However, this type of planning and sharing of the plan did not happen. Kate shared that the PL that she received was not a total wash but was not something that made drastic changes in her instruction (Interview 3). Thus, opportunities for continuous PL for teachers to refine their practices and improve results did not happen. Ongoing PL is the primary means for developing clear and consistent understanding, expectations, and practices associated with any reform (Fullan & Levin, 2008). Clarity about what is expected is necessary to minimize confusion and inconsistency in practice. District leaders need to set clear and consistent expectations about implementation with frequency, consistency, and accuracy to produce intended results. Only when a reform is fully implemented can it be sustained. Many
reforms in education fail because those making the change place too much emphasis on the
initiation phase and not enough emphasis on implementation and sustainability. Although, this
did not appear to be the case for Story Elementary, they did not have a strong initiation phase or
implementation phase; thus each phase was a challenge within itself.

With any change, there are always challenges that occur along the way. The CCSS
implementation was no different. Teachers expressed in their interviews that the CCSS were
challenging to teach due to all of the standards that needed to be taught and assessed in third and
fifth grades. Mae expressed in Interview 3 that third grade has over 40 ELA standards to be
taught and assessed over the course of a year, not including math, science, and social studies
standards. It is almost impossible to try to teach and assess all standards. Thus, learning how to
determine essential standards was a challenge faced by teachers at Story in the first two years of
implementation in regard to their instructional delivery. Fullan’s change theory states that during
the implementation phase an implementation dip is normal and typically behaviors change before
beliefs (2007). The CCSS were a challenge for teachers, but as Fullan states, the teachers’
behaviors in instruction started to change and thus so did their beliefs about CCSS standard
practices.

Data found by Courville (2011) and Nadarajan (2012) found PL to be a key component in
implementing curriculum changes. Shriner, Schlee and Liber (2010) and Spohn (2008) both
conducted qualitative studies to determine the teachers’ perspectives on implementing an
integrated curriculum approach to instruction. Both studies identified PL as a key factor in
implementing curriculum changes. Guskey (2002) identified three areas for PL: content
characteristics, process variables, and context characteristics. The focus of PL could come in the
form of logistical support on implementation, provide teachers with the necessary skills to
implement the change, or provide background on reasons for the particular change (Guskey, 2002). Without skills, teachers may experience a sense of anxiety that they are being asked to complete a task that they are ill-equipped to implement (Knoster et al., 2000). Teachers at Story Elementary felt that they were not prepared to tackle the challenge of implementing, planning, and assessing students utilizing the CCSS, thus creating a feeling of apprehension and need to learn on their own. “I am not sure that I would ever go back to the way that I was teaching before CCSS, but I would like to not feel the pressure that I feel teaching the CCSS” (Kate, Interview 3). Teachers at Story felt that the skills needed to instruct and assess the standards were not developed during PL, but rather through their own learning and teacher collaboration. Mae shared that her own learning is what launched her teaching of the CCSS (Interview 3). The teachers felt that the PL did not provide a reason for the CCSS change, nor did the PL provide them with the necessary skills to implement the change. However, what the PL did do for the teachers was ascertain the need to collaborate with peers, the need to read professional books and experiment with the standards until they felt comfortable in teaching them, thus creating a success in implementing the CCSS.

The teachers reported that along with the challenges in implementing the CCSS, there were also successes in their instructional delivery. The first implication for success is that teachers are using the CCSS in their daily instruction, integrating the standards successfully into their content area instruction, and having a deeper understanding of what they need to teach at each of their designated grade levels. Lola, Mae, Jackie, and Kate all were able to align their instruction to specific reading and writing standards as well as emphasize strong instructional practices that were successful in their teaching during their reflections.
Another success in the teachers’ instructional delivery is that the teachers felt more confident instructing with the CCSS in 2019 than they had in the first two years of implementation. Like with any change in education there was a learning curve, and it took time to adjust. These teachers felt that although the first couple of years were troublesome when the CCSS was initiated, but they have since learned to embrace the change and have found success in using the standards in their instruction. They often start with the standards before determining what and how they are going to instruct (Mae and Lola, Focus Group). This is a shift from the beginning two years of implementation.

**Sustainability**

The CCSS are based on a set of anchor standards for college and career readiness that were developed into a scope and sequence for Grades K-12. The standards were meant to provide students the skills to be able to problem solve and transfer their knowledge to new situations to solve real-world problems. However, the CCSS only provide a piece of this puzzle. “Standards are like building code, while curriculum is the blueprint. We don’t design buildings to merely meet code, we design them to be beautiful, functional spaces” (Hoyler, 2012, p. 2). Similarly, the CCSS are the pathway, but it is what teachers think and do that make the CCSS sustainable. This thinking underpins the last phase of Fullan’s (2001) change theory. The Sustainability phase is what takes place to ensure the initiative continues to meet the expectations set forth in the reform (Hargreaves, 2009; Holmes et al., 2013). With no plan on how the initiative was going to be sustained at Story Elementary, the teachers were left to determine the sustainability phase on their own.
Teachers at Story Elementary shared that they used their PLC time with their teams and specialists in the building to support the implementation, but other reform initiatives were presented, and the CCSS initiative got lost in the shuffle. This challenge has been overcome as years of implementing the CCSS has passed, but it has only been as successful as it is because teachers work in professional learning communities (PLCs) that focus on student learning and achievement (Kate, Focus Group). Kate shared that her PLC was, and still is, her “saving grace.” She also shared that having a “purposeful peer interaction was crucial to her improving her instruction using the CCSS” (Interview 3), and this still holds true today as teachers are constantly searching for the best ways to reach their students.

Teachers continue to use the CCSS to instruct, and it can be seen in teachers’ bi-weekly reflections that they are integrating the standards. These teachers are making instructional decisions based on their students and the standards daily, but the power of the change model has been lost because the teachers have not had sustained PL to continue to grow as teachers with the CCSS. Lola shared that she cannot remember the last time the PL was centered on the CC (Focus Group). Fullan (2008) states that knowledge flows as people pursue and continuously learn what works best. Implementing the CCSS is happening at Story Elementary in regard to sustaining the CCSS in practice because the teachers have identified the CCSS as a “powerful consequence” to change their instruction with or without PL tied to the standards (Mae, Focus Group).

Adding to the Research on Reform Efforts

With the implementation of the CCSS being so recent, only a few studies have determined the success or failure of teachers specifically looking at impact on teachers and student achievement (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Ellmore, 2004; Harbour, Evanovich,
Sweigart, & Hughes, 2015; Hattie, Birch, & Masters, 2015; Osthoff, Swanson, Allen, & White, 2005; Spring, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2003). This study adds to the research from the lens of teachers’ perceptions directly impacting classroom teacher instruction. There are also larger implications at the school level that will shed light on the perspectives teachers hold and the changes that should support the reform at the classroom level. As Mae stated, “The only thing constant in education is change” (Interview 1); thus we need to find ways to help teachers feel successful in implementing change. It takes more than just understanding that a change needs to take place; it is imperative that we understand how and why to support making the change a success. Fullan (2007) found that the early phases of any type of school reform (i.e., the processes of initiation, implementation and sustainability) should be occurring simultaneously at the classroom and at the school levels. At the classroom level, the teacher should be focused on instituting a change in curriculum and instruction. At the school level, the focus should be on capacity building or the process of learning how to change.

The human element, present in Fullan’s (2007) theory, refers to the people within the school who are directly responsible for the initiation, implementation, and sustainability of the change initiative. Teachers, the ones directly engaged in the implementation process, have the greatest impact on the success or failure of any educational change initiative (Gialamas et al., 2014; Hattie, 2009). If the people within a school have the greatest impact on the success of the implementation of change, then understanding the thinking of these implementers is important (Zembylas & Barker, 2007). In comparison with Fullan’s conditions of change, if the conditions exist in the environment during the implementation stage, there is a greater likelihood of successful implementation. Without the conditions, the adoption of the reform will be impeded and, thus, the implementation will fail.
The story as told by the teachers at Story Elementary contradicts complete failure. The reform may not have been planned and initiated the way the teachers anticipated or implemented the way the teachers would have intended, but the CCSS are alive and well in the instruction of the teachers at Story Elementary. This is something to celebrate in regard to current research. It is not always about what happens outside of the classroom as much as what happens inside of the classroom and what teachers know and do. This leads us into the research done by Hattie (2012) and his 10 mindframes for teachers.

Findings Through the Lens of Hattie’s Framework

Hattie (2012) contends that what teachers know and do in the classroom is less important than what teachers think. Thus, a teacher’s beliefs are the greatest influence on student achievement (Covay Minor et al., 2016; Dee & Jacob, 2011). Since this study focused on the instructional decisions teachers make on a daily basis, it is imperative to understand how these decisions affect student achievement and success more than their knowledge about curriculum and planning (Das & Bau, 2017). With this understanding, the teachers at Story Elementary had knowledge of the standards and curriculum, but they did not have a clear understanding of the changes in instructional practices that needed to occur to match the standard implementation. Consequently, the instructional decisions the teachers made, as referenced in their bi-weekly reflections, matched the learning standards, but these standards did not describe or mandate any particular teaching practice, curriculum, or assessment method. The teachers at Story Elementary designed their practices based on their understanding of the students in their classrooms.
When we look at the Hattie’s (2012) mindframes in connection to the change phases, these teachers were embodying several mindframes as they took on the challenge of implementing and sustaining the reform of the CCSS. The most applicable mindframes include:

1. I am an evaluator of my impact on student learning
2. I collaborate with my peers and my students about my conception of progress and my impact
3. I am a change agent and believe that all students can improve
4. I strive for challenge and not merely ‘doing your best’
5. I build relationships and trust so that learning can occur in a place where it is safe to make mistakes and learn from others
6. I focus on learning and the language of learning

All teachers are change agents because their fundamental task is to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching on students’ learning and achievement (Mindframes 1 and 4). Teachers have to focus on what they do to elicit the successes and failures of their students’ learning (Mindframe 1). Teachers at Story Elementary illustrated Hattie’s mindframe thinking in that they focused their instructional decisions on what their students needed and what they felt was the most impactful instructional design for their students to be successful in meeting the standard addressed. Lola shared that she teaches students, not standards. The students tell her what they know, and then she uses the standards as a guide to help them be successful (Interview 2). Jackie added to this thinking by saying, “Standards are the roadmap, I am the vehicle, and students are the drivers” (Interview 1). Like Lola and Jackie, Mae added her deeper perspective on the standards:
CCSS is just another acronym for me to remember. It is one of the many initiatives we will be told are best for our students, but teachers are what is best for students. Initiatives come and go, but I will always be here. (Mae, Focus Group)

Once again these teachers’ thinking aligns to Hattie’s Mindframe 4 of teachers being change agents to implement the CCSS to the best of their abilities. This thinking is also supported by a growing review of literature showing that traditional educational initiatives have little impact on test scores, but teacher effort and teacher pedagogy do (Bruns et al., 2014; Evans & Popova, 2015; Glewwe & Muralidharan, 2015).

Another of Hattie’s (2012) mindframes that can be seen in the efforts of the teachers interviewed during the phases of change during the CCSS reform is the relationship building that occurred among teams of teachers. Although this may not have been the direct plan of the district, what occurred was the team of teachers relied on each other for support to implement and sustain the CCSS reform initiative. Jackie shared that the PLCs met and determined goals for their students based on the data (Interview 2). Teaching strategies were discussed, implemented, revised, and sustained through conversations with grade-level peers as well as through teachers’ own research and reading (Mae, Interview 1). This directly relates to Mindframe 9, where teachers are building relationships and trust so learning can occur in a place where it is safe to make mistakes and learn from others.

At Story Elementary, collaboration and compliance occurred because of the top-down or site-based leadership. However, collaboration has effective results in education because collaboration contributes to focus and coherence (Hattie, 2018). When teachers rely on each other as a resource, valuable ideas and strategies can be put into action. According to Hattie, when teachers interact over an instructional practice, the language of learning is shared and the consistency of instructional practices evolves (Mindframe 3 and Mindframe10). Collaboration
also supports teachers in pushing themselves to discover new ways to instruct based on their new learning from their colleagues. This can be seen in the work teachers shared about their understanding of learning progressions and from their PLC conversations (Mindframe 5). Thus, when teachers strive to be and do more than their best, their students reap the benefits of their trial and error (Hattie, 2018).

Since implementing the CCSS, these teachers have found that the standards do provide a map of what is expected of students from grade to grade. This is clear in the bi-weekly reflections that showed they were aware of the standards and were diligent and responsive in their teaching and in building professional relationships. One way the teachers increased professional relationships (Mindframe 9) was through broadening their learning networks. Jackie, a fifth-grade teacher, expressed that since she was not receiving in-depth training at school on the standards, she reached out to other colleagues and read several professional books that increased her knowledge (Interview 3). Jackie, along with Kate and Mae, felt that they had to collaborate with their grade-level teams to be more responsive to student needs based on assessment feedback (Focus Group). They also expressed the need to reach out to district colleagues and increase their professional learning networks to be fluid and responsive to their students’ needs. Although this was the expectation before CCSS, they felt it became more of a need when teachers had to look at their students’ work in comparison with other students’ work. This then created self-reflection among the teachers to analyze their own teaching practices and what they could change to meet the needs of their students and the standards. This seemed to be a positive outcome expressed by all teachers in the study.

Hattie’s (2018) mindframes have nothing to do with teacher training, background, test scores, rubrics, class sizes, or pay scales. They are all about a teacher’s passion, commitment,
and ability to be the change agent needed in the classroom. The foundational elements required for success are passionate, involved, committed, and flexible teachers. This dedication and commitment can be seen in the interviews and focus group responses of the teachers at Story Elementary. Hattie contends that almost any approach will work if delivered well and teachers need to focus less on PL and more on the students. This is contradictory to what the teachers believed at Story Elementary. Much of their conversation was about the need for PL to enhance their instruction.

Implications of Findings to the Larger Field of Education

There were successes and challenges shared by the teachers at Story Elementary regarding the CCSS and its implementation and sustainability. As an educational system, we can learn from their mistakes and triumphs. One of the first lessons is that no matter how big or small a reform, it needs to be taken through the phases of a change process (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Ellmore, 2004; Spring, 2008). Many of the shortcomings at Story Elementary could have potentially been avoided if district administration had followed the phases as outlined by Fullan. Since reforms are prevalent in education and, as Mae said, change is the only thing constant in education, we need to make sure all stakeholders, state representatives, school boards, district personnel, and teachers understand the reform and the scope and sequence of the change.

Coupled with the idea that a systems-based approach would have supported teachers’ learning and implementation of the CCSS, direct PL on learning progressions and how to instruct different levels of learners would also be appropriate for the general field of education. The traditional system moves students through as cohorts, and the educational system has struggled to capitalize on what is known about student learning. The result for students has been described
by Salman Khan (2016) as “Swiss cheese” learning gaps, in which students move from grade level to grade level but lack sufficient knowledge to understand and master concepts that are more challenging.

One of the positive aspects that came out of this study is that these teachers are learners. Even without a direct plan for implementing the CCSS, the teachers embraced the change and focused on improvement in the face of perceived ineffective PL. The instructional practices and knowledge they obtained through collaboration assisted in their own understanding, and by 2019, the four teachers felt comfortable teaching CCSS (Gialamas et al., 2014). Therefore, with the PL the teachers received in 2013 about the CCSS and the passage of time to implement the change and understand the standards, these teachers eventually became more comfortable with the reform. This study captured voices of teachers who were engaged in the CCSS PL, thus adding their perspectives about the initiation, implementation, and sustainability of the reform.

Table 8 captures reconceptualized steps for school districts, individual schools, and teachers to use when starting and carrying out a new reform to make the change process more successful and conducive to teachers’ PL needs and their mindframes.

Difference Between Elementary and Secondary School Implementation

Teacher PL is a complex and ongoing challenge as educational systems attempt to deliver excellent programming in pursuit of increased student achievement (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). No matter what grade level one teaches, it seems that finding time for job-embedded PL is one of the
Table 8
Reconceptualized Five-Step Approach to Delivery of Educational Reform: Action Steps

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reconceptualized Action Steps</th>
<th>Consequences If Action Is Missing</th>
<th>Consequences If Implemented Well</th>
<th>Fullan’s Change Theory and Hattie’s Mindframes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1 - Communicate the why behind the change</strong></td>
<td>Mandated top-down reform, resulting in a lack of buy-in from school stakeholders and unfavorable attitudes toward the adopted reform.</td>
<td>Education leaders should involve school stakeholders, including parents and teachers early in the process to learn about the reform and get involved in deciding how to best implement the reform in the particular school. Administration also needs to understand the reform so consistency for professional learning can occur across buildings.</td>
<td>Initiation&lt;br&gt;Initiation&lt;br&gt;Mindframe 4&lt;br&gt;Mindframe 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2 - Create a plan including teacher voice in implementing the change</strong></td>
<td>There is a lack of understanding by school stakeholders, regarding changes in behavior expected of them, and teachers resist the change or find their own ways to understand the change, causing a lack of consistency and implementation. Often there is insufficient time for principals and teachers to implement the new strategies required under the reform. It is common to have an inadequate or ineffective allocation of resources for implementation, due to the newness of the reform and lack of preparation.</td>
<td>• An action plan must be developed before the school can determine how the implementation will be carried out by all stakeholders and across buildings in the district. This plan should be shared and revised as needed based on implementation and student data. • Timelines should be created to help hold all stakeholders accountable, but also time should be allocated for the plan to work. • Adequate resources should be available before the plan is put into action to allow for teachers to focus on instruction instead of a lack of resources.</td>
<td>Implementation&lt;br&gt;Implementation&lt;br&gt;Mindframe 1&lt;br&gt;Mindframe 4&lt;br&gt;Mindframe 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued on following page)
| Step 3 - Continuously go back to the plan and revise PL needs of teachers to promote reflection and collaboration | Lack of continued delivery of professional learning. Lack of reflection and collaboration available for teachers | • PL needs centering around beginning, middle and end of the implementation phase.  
• Ongoing PL is needed to develop clear and consistent understanding, expectations, and practices associated with the reform.  
• Monitor changes in teacher practices and strategies to identify challenges and provide ways to overcome them.  
• Establish a continuous improvement process that is implemented at all levels of the education system and embedded in its normal processes. That is, regularly check how the reform is being implemented. | Implementation  
Mindframe 1  
Mindframe 3  
Mindframe 9  
Mindframe 10 |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Step 4 - Build teacher capacity | Inadequate efforts to build school capacity to implement school reform including school stakeholder knowledge of roles and responsibilities, as well as stakeholder leadership and skills. | • Create a culture that balances accountability with experimentation to facilitate principals’ and teachers’ efforts to change their practice.  
• Provide adequate time to learn new practices without feeling threatened | Implementation  
Mindframe 4  
Mindframe 10 |
| Step 5 - Focus on one reform at a time and continue to collect data until the reform is sustainable | School districts revert to a model proven to be ineffective due to impatience and the desire for quick results. When results are not seen as quickly as administration would like, a new reform is often put in place to combat the old reform envisioned to have “failed”. | • Allow time for the reform to take root.  
• It is counterproductive to start one reform and then decide to start another before it has been deemed sustainable.  
• Once the reform has been implemented, all stakeholders involved must show fidelity to one reform until there is concrete data or evidence that indicates the reform is effective or ineffective. | Sustainability  
Mindframe 1  
Mindframe 4  
Mindframe 10 |
biggest challenges with implementing the CCSS. However, secondary teachers may find it less challenging to utilize the standards in their everyday instruction. This is because secondary teachers are specialists in one content area. Typically, a high school teacher only teaches English/language arts or mathematics. This narrows the amount of standards one needs to be familiar with. The other significant difference in elementary and secondary standards is that the standards for secondary range from Grades 9-12 instead of the grade-specific standards that teachers have in elementary. However, the challenge implementing the CCSS comes for secondary-content teachers that teach other subjects beyond ELA or math. These teachers are experts in their content area (i.e., history or physical science) but not necessarily ELA or math. This causes a challenge when these particular standards need to be incorporated into their content and instruction.

The idea of having content teachers teach literacy skills is not new. In fact, many districts have invested resources, time, and money into the improvement of content-area literacy instruction for secondary teachers (Valli & Stout, 2004). In addition, teacher preparation programs have long required pre-service teachers to take content area-reading courses (Moje, 1996). Within the CCSS English language arts domain, the standards intended for secondary social studies teachers fall under the title Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects.

The CCSS are supposed to transform the way teachers teach. That is, secondary social studies teachers are expected to integrate these standards into their content standards. Since the CCSS do not include any content-based standards for social studies or any other subject matter, many teachers at the secondary level struggle to integrate the ELA standards into their content-specific classrooms since teachers rely heavily on textbooks (Beck & Eno, 2012; Russell &
In one study by Kenna and Russell (2015), 41% of the participants reported not receiving PL on integrating the new standards into their instruction. The more interesting data centered on the amount of CCSS PL self-reported by the teachers. They found no significant difference between teachers who attended four or more CCSS training sessions versus those who did not attend any training session on the CCSS (Kenna & Russell, 2015).

The CCSS implementation varied across the levels of education. However, what seems to be the same is the integration of the standards into the content areas and the PL tied to learning how to integrate the standards into instruction, thus making the PL across all levels of education imperative to any reform movement

Recommendations for the Field of Education

Teachers’ perceptions have an impact on the sustainability of an implementation. If teachers have negative perceptions, implementation of new changes such as the CCSS can be halted or delayed. This study serves as a reminder that a comprehensive plan needs to be shared with all teachers, elementary principals, and instructional support coaches. Then comprehensive plans for PL can be effective as they center around best practices in teaching and student learning. This is imperative as new reforms and educational initiatives present themselves.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study may influence how local officials view the CCSS and the influences that changes in education have on teachers and students alike. Since this study only focused on a small group of teachers from one suburban school district, future research could focus on how
the CCSS fairs against states that did not adopt the CCSS. Since standards tell educators what students should be able to do by the end of a grade or course, it is up to the educators to figure out how to deliver the instruction. Future research could compare the perspectives of teachers implementing the CCSS and teachers who are not.

Since PL was a substantial concern for the teachers at Story Elementary, it would benefit teachers to see how other districts implemented the new reform and how they are sustaining the change in their district among educators. This study would benefit administrators and teachers in determining next steps concerning new reform initiatives being implemented in districts across the country.

Although the teachers did not use the word “fear” when describing how they learned to utilize the standards in daily instruction, fear was created in the knowing-doing gaps among teachers within Story Elementary because taking risks to try the new curriculum standards based on independently learned information meant some teachers felt less adequate and less prepared. This then created an engaged learning environment in some classrooms and the lack thereof for other teachers. It was also reported that this created a divide among teachers in the same building (Jackie and Kate, Focus Group). As these teachers expressed, some sought knowledge to better prepare themselves to teach the standards and others did nothing to help themselves. This disequilibrium created classroom environments within Story Elementary that were engaged and focused on the standards as well as others where change was resisted, thus creating a learning environment not fit for all students’ learning styles associated with the CCSS. Further research would benefit teachers as they learn to cope with the stressors of initiating, implementing, and sustaining a classroom culture of learning.
Conclusion

The teachers in this study were attentive to what was needed to improve their teaching based on their students’ needs. The standards changed the way the teachers thought about learning progressions and the way they taught based on the assessment data they were receiving from their students. In addition, the teachers noted that each grade-level team began to prioritize the standards to plan productive lessons and foster stronger student outcomes.

The teachers found that their role in using the standards to plan productively required significant interpretation and awareness of the genres as well as a balance across content. Mae expressed, “I planned with my ISC and reading specialist along with my team to collaboratively work to understand the standards for third grade students” (Focus Group). Teachers related to several of Hattie’s (2018) mindframes in the process of prioritizing standards to plan productively. Jackie noted that the language of the standards threw her off, but once she was able to look at the standards that really mattered to her students’ “teaching them was not that hard” (Interview 2). As they worked with the CCSS and considered the progression as well as what they were already doing, they began to align the standards with the content-area skills and the change process began to take shape. The teachers were able to employ quality ideas as they built capacity and ownership over time.

Thus, the teachers began to view themselves as productive consumers of the CCSS. Understanding the perceptions of the teachers implementing curriculum changes allows administrators to provide prescriptive PL, which leads teachers through the change process for successful implementation. Nolan and Meister (2000) identified time for deep understanding, specifically when the teachers did not initiate the change, as one of their assertions, which was
recognized by Davis Bianco (2010) and Spohn (2008), who acknowledged PL was a component of the successful implementation of change. To ensure student achievement and teacher success, it is necessary to investigate teachers’ perceptions of mandated curriculum changes. Student attitudes mimic the teacher’s perspective within a classroom (Cochran-Smith, 2012; Trainin & Wilson, 2010). This suggests that positive student attitude is a direct reflection of the teachers’ perceptions. Teachers’ perceptions are a necessary focus of study to ensure appropriate PL opportunities for teacher success and, ultimately, student achievement. Moreover, for this, and any educational expertise, to have influence, perspectives must be shared.

Once I wrapped my head around the standards, I was able to apply them to many contexts, but I first needed to share my thoughts with my colleagues. Then I could see that we were all being challenged and we needed to share our thinking to support each other. (Kate, Focus Group)

Change is a process rather than an event. Teachers need to speak up and share their perspectives when it comes to changes in the school system. It is one powerful way to transform the institution to make it a better place for teachers and students.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

2012-13 DISTRICT AGENDAS FOR CCSS LITERACY TEAM
GOALS:

- Establish a core district leadership group that is knowledgeable in the area of ELA Common Core
- Develop knowledge and understanding about the structure and application of ELA Common Core State Standards
- Build capacity for the implementation of ELA Common Core shifts in practice using strategic and informed choices
- Become familiar with information from PARCC (assessment and support)
- Collaborate with colleagues by processing professional learning that is shared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Thursday, October 18,   |          | 4:00 pm - 7:00 pm | Introduction of: beliefs, vision, work and members  
| 2012                    |          |              | Overview of the ELA Common Core State Standards and progressions  
|                         |          |              | - Foster clarity in what is expected of students each year K-12  
|                         |          |              | - Analyze the instructional implications of the language of the CCSS for ELA  
|                         |          |              | - Develop an understanding of the similarities and differences between ELA and Disciplinary Standards for Reading and Writing  
|                         |          |              | - Analyze/Compare the instructional implications of the integrated nature of the CCSS for ELA |
| Thursday, November 8,   |          | 4:00 pm - 7:00 pm | Provide participants with an opportunity to understand and reflect upon each of the key shifts and their implications for practice  
| 2012                    |          |              | Shift #1: Building knowledge through context-rich non-fiction  
|                         |          |              | - Realize connection of schema to comprehension  
<p>|                         |          |              | - Consider types of texts teachers might choose to accomplish integration of ELA standards |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, January 10, 2013</td>
<td>Hickory Knolls</td>
<td>4:00 pm - 7:00 pm</td>
<td>Shift #2: Reading, Writing, and Speaking grounded in evidence from text both literary and informational</td>
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<td>- Locate and use evidence from text</td>
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<td>- Ground responses in evidence from text</td>
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<td>- Engage in rich and rigorous conversations grounded in text</td>
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<td>- Distinguish the difference between text dependent and non-text dependent questions</td>
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<td>- Conduct short focused research; comparison and synthesis of ideas across multiple texts</td>
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<td>Invite participants to provide one piece of evidence of this shift implemented into practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday, February 21, 2013</td>
<td>Hickory Knolls</td>
<td>4:00 pm - 7:00 pm</td>
<td>Shift #3: Regular practice with complex text and its academic language</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Understand features of complex text</td>
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<td>- Participate in conversations to reliably scaffold</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
# School: Story Elementary

## School-Wide Goal:
In order to succeed as 21st century learners, Wasco students show evidence of perseverance by demonstrating growth as independent, flexible and self-directed problem-solvers by the end of the 2012-13 school year.

## Literacy Goal:
K-5 students will learn to write to inform and share opinions using information and evidence from text-based sources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>WHY</th>
<th>TIMELINE</th>
<th>WHO</th>
<th>MEASURES</th>
<th>RESOURCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teachers will...</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• build shared knowledge of the CCSS and PARCC, with emphasis on the strong link between the reading and writing standards (performance assessments)</td>
<td>Shared knowledge of the reading-writing connection in the standards will enable all students to progress effectively.</td>
<td>2012-2014 School year</td>
<td>K-5 Faculty</td>
<td>Reading-Writing performance Tasks</td>
<td>Staff members who have experience teaching students to write from sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• learn how to teach students to write informational and opinion pieces using analysis of text evidence</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Effective models of instructional practices and integrated performance tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• create a set of simple and age-appropriate progressions to help students acquire keyboarding skills (Gr. 1-5)</td>
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<td>Pathways to the Common Core</td>
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<tr>
<td>• implement their learning and share their insights with each other</td>
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<td>PARCC Consortium</td>
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<tr>
<td>• analyze student data to determine the effectiveness of their instruction</td>
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<td>CCSS websites and other published resources</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Keyboarding resources for school and home</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>STUDENT STRATEGIES</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Students will...</strong></td>
<td>Students need to</td>
<td>2012-2014 School year</td>
<td>K-5 Faculty</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>-learn to read closely and use text-based evidence to analyze and understand a wide-range of text</td>
<td>be able to extract key information, analyze from multiple texts, and synthesize this information in order to write about what they've read</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reading-Writing Performance Tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>-use text evidence to write informational and opinion pieces</td>
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<td>K-5 Writing Rubrics</td>
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<tr>
<td>-use information from multiple texts</td>
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<td>-use writing structures and conventions effectively</td>
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<tr>
<td>-acquire effective keyboarding skills to support PARCC and other assessment tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>-begin simple keyboarding skills in first grade</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
## PARENT INVOLVEMENT STRATEGIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parents will…</th>
<th>Students need multiple opportunities to read and write from a variety of texts. Writing at home will provide additional and necessary practice so that students can reach or exceed grade level proficiency targets. Practicing keyboarding at home will enable students to acquire the proficiency needed to write from sources using technology.</th>
<th>2012-2014 School year</th>
<th>K-5 Faculty</th>
<th>Reading-Writing performance Tasks</th>
<th>Information about writing at home shared in newsletters and curriculum nights</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-provide opportunities for their children to write at home</td>
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<tr>
<td>-write together with their children using text evidence and detail</td>
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<tr>
<td>-use keyboarding resources on Story School LRC page for children to practice</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

WALKTHROUGH GUIDE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building: ______________________</th>
<th>Trimester: ______________</th>
<th>Grade: ________</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walkthrough timing (circle one):</td>
<td>Beginning of Lesson</td>
<td>Middle of Lesson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Target: Posted:</td>
<td>Presented:</td>
<td>Teacher Verbally Articulated:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look and Listen For</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular practice with complex text and its academic language.</td>
<td>Evidence that the teacher:</td>
<td>Evidence that the students:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Engages in read aloud of a complex text</td>
<td>• Re-read a portion of a complex text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Explicitly refers to complex text</td>
<td>• Engage in discourse around a complex text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Facilitates discourse around questions linked to text</td>
<td>• Apply knowledge of text and learning experiences in writing, speaking, and reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uses mentor sentences from text</td>
<td>• Use class-created visuals related to complex text (e.g. word wall, anchor chart of text structure, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uses excerpts/concepts of complex texts for specific purpose</td>
<td>• Use class-created visuals related to text conversations (e.g. anchor chart of discourse sentence starters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Incorporates instruction of academic vocabulary</td>
<td>• Engage in complex tasks connected to the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tier two words</td>
<td>• Read a portion of a text for a specific purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Tier three words</td>
<td>• Engage in discourse using text evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Uses academic language in instruction and conversation with students</td>
<td>• Engage in student-student discourse using academic vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Use academic vocabulary in discussing texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational</td>
<td>Type of writing used:</td>
<td>Speaking and listening:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading:</td>
<td>• Narrative</td>
<td>• Teacher-led discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Opinion/Argumentative</td>
<td>• Student-led discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Informational</td>
<td>Text dependent questions:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Research</td>
<td>• Literal questions (within the text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading:</td>
<td>• Inferential questions (beyond the text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Shared</td>
<td>• Analytical questions (about the text)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interactive read aloud</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Guided</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Independent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build knowledge through content rich nonfiction</td>
<td>Type of text(s):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Literary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Stories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Poetry</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Drama</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Informational</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Literary nonfiction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Historical, scientific, technical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Collection of texts (paired text)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Foundational Skills

**Evidence that the teacher:**
- Provides explicit instruction that uses:
  - Talk
  - Hands-on activities
  - Appropriate level of the sequence
  - Higher level thinking
  - Systematic instruction
- Coach students to use interactive reading strategies
- Coach students to apply sound, pattern, and meaning knowledge
- Works with specific groups of students as needed

**Evidence that the students:**
- Reflect on strategies used while reading
- Use resources such as word walls to write unfamiliar words
- Apply alphabetic principle to read unfamiliar words
- Apply alphabetic principle to write unfamiliar words

### Key Concepts for Instructional Shifts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shift</th>
<th>Key Concept(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Regular practice with complex text and its academic language | • Growing, increasing complexity as it relates to text  
• Progressive development of reading comprehension (task complexity)  
• Academic vocabulary (tier two and tier three words) is grown through a mix of conversation, instruction, and reading |
| Reading, writing, and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both literary and informational | • Readers, writers, and speakers intentionally use text in responses  
• Inferences are based on careful attention to text  
• Questions depend on having read text  
• In writing, shift from narrative to evidence, including to inform and persuade |
| Build knowledge through content rich nonfiction | • Students build and develop background knowledge through text |

**Progression of Text-dependent Questions: Moving Beyond the Literal**

- Whole
- Across texts
- Entire text
- Segments
- Paragraph
- Sentence
- Word

- Opinions, Arguments, Intertextual Connections
- Inferences
- Author’s Purpose
- Vocab & Text Structure
- Key Details
- General Understandings
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Foundational Skills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Key concepts of foundational skills include concepts of print, the alphabetic principle, and the many levels of orthographic knowledge spanning developmental stages across K-5 (refer to K-5 Word Study document)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundational skills are not an end in and of themselves; however, are a necessary and critical component of a comprehensive literacy curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundational skills are acquired in a variety of ways and serve to build automatically, which fosters deep levels of comprehension for all students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- High School: 30% Literary, 70% Informational
- Students need opportunities to read, write, speak, and listen throughout content areas
APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM
I agree to participate in the research study titled, *Understanding Elementary Teachers’ Perceptions about their Experiences Implementing the CCSS*, being conducted by Angelyn Dieckman, a graduate student at Northern Illinois University. I have been informed that the purpose of this study is to investigate the perspectives of elementary classroom teachers regarding the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the impact on their instructional decisions related to their classroom teaching and student learning.

I understand that if I agree to participate in this study, I will be asked to do the following: participate in a minimum of three unstructured interviews (3 hours in total), a minimum of three structured interviews (3 hours in total), a minimum of three focus groups (4-6 hours in total), and be willing to share personal plans and documents with the researcher. The total amount of time that the participant would be dedicated to would be approximately 12 hours outside of school during a 3-4 month period.

I am aware that my participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time without penalty or prejudice, and that if I have any additional questions concerning this study, I may contact Angelyn Dieckman at [insert contact information] or Dr. Elizabeth Wilkins at [insert contact information]. I understand that if I wish further information regarding my rights as a research subject, I may contact the Office of Research Compliance at Northern Illinois University at [insert contact information].

I understand that the intended benefits of this study include an understanding of reform implementation and the impacts that it has on instructional decisions made Northern Illinois University is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution. by individual classroom teachers. The larger benefit is that some of the perceptions and feelings can be shared with higher district personnel so that they may consider some of the unknown implications a reform has on teachers, so they can replicate or try a new approach as needed.

I understand that all information gathered during this study will be kept confidential. All names and locations will be pseudonyms. All recordings and transcripts from the interviews and focus groups will be shred one year after the completion of the study.

I understand that my consent to participate in this project does not constitute a waiver of any legal rights or redress I might have as a result of my participation, and I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this consent form.
I agree to participate in this study. ____________________________  ____________

I agree to be audiotaped. ____________________________  Date:

______________________________________

Your Future. Our Focus.
Northern Illinois University is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution
Establish Rapport and Introduction

“My name is Angelyn Dieckman. Thank you for coming. I want to briefly review the intent of this study. The intent is to understand the perspectives of teachers implementing the CCSS and the impact that the standards have on their instructional decision making. This part of the interview process involves three parts. The first part will focus on your personal knowledge and use of the CCSS. I will ask you about your understanding of the standards and how you use them to plan for instruction. The purpose is to get your perceptions. There is no right or wrong or desirable or undesirable answers. I would like you to feel comfortable with saying what you really think and how you really feel. The second interview will focus on the PL that you received and are currently receiving in regards to the CCSS. Once again, the purpose is to gain insight into your perceptions. The last interview will directly focus around the resources provided and the resources you currently use in regards to your instructional planning. If it is okay with you, I will be tape-recording our conversation. The purpose of this is so that I can get all the details but at the same time be able to carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that all your comments will remain confidential. I will be compiling a report that will contain all comments without any reference to individuals. You will receive a copy of this to review and approve. Do you have any questions before we get started?”

Conduct interview

Interview 1: Past History as an Educator. Knowledge and Use of the CCSS

1. How long have you been teaching? Describe how teaching, in your opinion has changed?
2. Discuss your interpretation of the purpose of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).
3. On a scale of 1-3, with 1 being little knowledge, 2 being sufficient knowledge and 3 being a robust amount of knowledge: how knowledgeable are you about the content of the CCSS? Explain why you feel this way.

4. What are your main areas of concern about the CCSS since implementation began in the summer of 2012?

5. How do you currently plan using the CCSS?

**Interview 2: Professional Learning and the Implementation Process**

1. Do you prefer whole group staff development training where you can observe and listen or do you prefer small group trainings where you can participate and interact with others? Provide a rationale for your answer.

2. Explain how the professional learning you received about the CCSS helped to meet the needs of students.

3. Describe the opportunities you were provided to network with other educators at the district level. Which of those opportunities did you find most and least helpful and why?

4. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being the least and 5 being the most, what is the level of professional learning support you are currently receiving specific to the CCSS?

5. Explain what types of professional learning opportunities you would like to see offered now having implemented the standards since 2012-13.

6. What professional learning resources do you think should have been offered to support you during the shifts to the CCSS?

7. Please, share any comments or concerns that you may have had or are currently experiencing in regards to the implementation of the CCSS and professional learning that I have not asked.
Interview 3: Reflection, Resources and Current Use

1. What resources were you provided by the district that Story Elementary is a part of that aligned with the CCSS? How do you personally utilize the resources provided?

2. What additional resources were supplied by Story Elementary that you found useful? 3. How would you recommend resources and strategies be shared among educators and schools within the district?

4. What resources do you currently use? How do you find them?

5. Who or what influences your decisions to use particular resources?

5. How do you measure success of these resources?

Probes:

Would you like to elaborate on that?

Can you clarify what you mean by…?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

Would you give an example?

Debrief:

Thank you for all of your time and efforts here. A typed transcript of the interview will be given to you in the next week. Please review it for validity, credibility and accuracy. Please let me know if something is incorrect. Do you have any questions for me?

Notes:

*Identify new experiences or responses shared by the interviewees that now need to be incorporated into subsequent interviews.

*Reflect on the talk and responses from each interview. Identify and refine any questions that need to be addressed in the next interview.
APPENDIX F

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS
Welcome

“Good afternoon and welcome to our focus group session. Thanks for taking the time to join me to talk about the perspectives of teachers implementing the CCSS and the impact that the standards have on their instructional decision making. My name is Angelyn and I will be moderating the discussion today.

You were chosen because you have taught for a minimum of ten years in the elementary classroom, so you are familiar with the change in standards that have occurred and the reforms that have taken place.

There are no wrong answers, but rather differing points of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from what others have said.

I will be tape recording this session because I do not want to miss any of your comments. Please be respectful of each other’s ideas. We do not have to agree with others, but we must be respectful as others share their views. We will be on a first name basis today, and I will not use any names in my research. You can be assured of complete confidentiality. I am asking that you refrain from using your cell phones during our time together. Please make sure they are silenced now.

My role as moderator will be to guide the discussion, not to be a part of the discussion. I have placed name cards on the table in front of each of you to help us remember each other’s names. Let’s find out more about each of us around the table. Please tell us your name and how long you have been teaching.”
Questioning protocol

**Descriptive Questions:**

1. What is your comfort level with the transition to CCSS?
2. What do you believe will be the greatest challenge in implementing the CCSS across the district?
3. What is your understanding of the resources available to you on the CCSS that are not part of a formal training?

**Structural Questions:**

1. Do you think professional learning opportunities should provide opportunities for cross grade level communication? If so, what types of opportunities would you prefer?
2. Have you participated in professional learning on the CCSS? Can you describe the activities at the training?
3. Who provided the professional learning training you have participated in? Please describe these experiences?
4. What would be the most valuable professional learning opportunity that you would request, if any, and why?
5. What do you believe is your greatest success in implementing the CCSS in your classroom?
6. What do you believe is the greatest challenge in implementing the CCSS in your classroom?

**Contrast Questions:**

1. How prepared do you feel to implement the CCSS in your classroom with the amount of professional learning you have received?
2. Are you familiar with resources outside your district to support you with the process of implementing the CCSS in your classroom?
3. What is your understanding of the meaning “Career and College Readiness” for students in relation to the CCSS?

**Conclusion**

- Summarize with confirmation
- Review the purpose and ask if anything has been missed
- Thanks and dismissal
APPENDIX G

BI-WEEKLY REFLECTION
Please respond to a bi-weekly reflection for 4 weeks. Please record the date that each reflection took place. Each reflection can be a video recording or a typed response to document your perspectives on instructional delivery and instructional decision making using the CCSS. Please make sure that each video reflection is no more than five minutes in length. Please respond to the following statements in the template if you are videoing or typing your response. This standard set of questions include success and challenges that they faced during the lesson as well as why they choose to instruct the way that they did.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>ELA CCSS</th>
<th>Successes and challenges during my lesson today in regards to my instructional delivery</th>
<th>Successes and challenges during my lesson today in regard to my instructional decisions</th>
<th>Considerations when planning this lesson</th>
<th>How I know that students achieve my learning target.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
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