

11-18-2015

The Common Core State Standards: Its Reported Effects on the Instructional Decision Making of Middle School Social Studies Teachers

Tracy Tilotta

University of South Florida, trtilott@mail.usf.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd>

 Part of the [Other Education Commons](#)

Scholar Commons Citation

Tilotta, Tracy, "The Common Core State Standards: Its Reported Effects on the Instructional Decision Making of Middle School Social Studies Teachers" (2015). *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*.
<http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/6039>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

The Common Core State Standards: Its Reported Effects on the Instructional Decision
Making of Middle School Social Studies Teachers

by

Tracy R. Tilotta

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Teaching and Learning
College of Education
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Bárbara C. Cruz, Ed.D
James A. Duplass, Ph.D.
Barbara J. Shircliffe, Ph.D.
Stephen J. Thornton, Ph.D.

Date of Approval:
October 28, 2015

Keywords: instructional strategies, instructional and curricular gatekeeping

Copyright © 2015, Tracy R. Tilotta

DEDICATION

This manuscript is dedicated to my son Owen, my niece Sarah, and my nephew Chris. The three of you have brought me so much joy and are truly my sweethearts. Sarah and Chris you were my first two loves and Owen you are my world and I love you more than anything. The three of you have been an inspiration to move forward and complete this manuscript. When I had my doubts that this could not be accomplished, I thought of the three of you. I wanted to set a positive example for you. I wanted you to realize that you can do anything you put your mind to no matter how difficult it may be. If you work hard and stay determined the possibilities of what you will achieve are endless. You are the author of your own life story --- don't dream it, be it!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to start by thanking the participants that agreed to be in this study. All of you are hardworking dedicated teachers that truly make a difference in your students' lives. I would like to thank my cohort for all their endless support and encouragement throughout this process. I am very thankful I was given the opportunity to learn with you and from you. Teresa Bergstrom you have been a huge part of my life throughout the latter stages of this process. You and I were colleagues and cohort members prior to our pregnancies but that life-changing event completely sealed the deal for our friendship. #MGG! I am looking forward to being your friend and colleague for years to come!

I feel so fortunate to have worked with and learned from some of the most amazing Social Studies Education professors. I am confident that I am very prepared for all my future endeavors due to the following people. Dr. Bárbara Cruz, it is with a deep sense of gratitude that I wish to thank you for your extreme patience you have had with me over the past several years. I honestly can't thank you enough for the endless support you have provided and the care you have taken of me. You have inspired me to become a better teacher, student, and writer. I would like to thank Dr. Jimmy Duplass for always treating me kindly. I will never forget when I asked you for your advice regarding a practicum position and you said, "If you were my daughter this is what I would tell you to do", that just melted my heart. Thank you for looking out for my best interest and sharing all your years of knowledge with our cohort. I will never forget the endless Saturday hours spent in EDU 305. I would like to thank Dr. Stephen Thornton for your insight and your experiences that you have shared. You have been a wealth of knowledge. I would also

like to thank Dr. Barbara Shirecliffe who has helped guide me through this arduous process and for always being there to assist when needed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	iv
ABSTRACT	v
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Introduction	1
Background/Rationale	7
Statement of Problem	8
Theoretical Framework	9
Research Questions	11
Assumptions	11
Operational Definition of Terms	12
Limitations	13
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE	14
Introduction	14
A Brief History of Standard Based Reform Movement	17
A Brief History of the Common Core State Standards	23
The NCSS Position Statement on the Common Core State Standards	30
The Arguments for the Common Core State Standards	32
The Arguments against the Common Core State Standards	36
The Common Core State Standards and Social Studies Instruction	43
Instructional Gatekeeping	56
Gaps in the Common Core State Standards Literature	64
CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND PROCEDURES	66
Purpose of Study	66
Research Questions	67
Qualitative and Case Study Methodology	68
Participants	70
Participant Inclusion Criteria	70
Data Collection	71
Analysis	72
Reliability	74
Limitations	75
Ethical Consideration	76
Institutional Review Board	76
Role of the Researcher	77

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	78
Introduction	78
Data Collection	79
Participants.....	80
Findings.....	85
Research Question 1: To What extent does the CCSS influence middle school social teachers' decision making in the types of instructional strategies they choose to use in the classroom?	86
Beliefs that Influence Teachers' Decision Making.....	88
Standardized Tests and the Implementation of CCSS	96
CCSS are Best Practices	100
Overall Impact of CCSS on Teachers' Decision Making.....	105
Research Question 2: What specific types of instructional strategies do middle school social studies teachers report to use when implementing the CCSS?	110
Research Question 3: Do middle school social studies teachers feel adequately prepared to make decisions regarding the types of instructional strategies they choose to use to implement the CCSS in their classrooms?	121
Insufficient Teacher Education and Resources	123
Inconsistent Focus of the PLC	128
Research Question 4: What instructional successes do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS in their classrooms?.....	134
Research Question 5: What instructional challenges do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS in their classrooms?.....	138
Researcher Reflective Journal	144
Conclusion	150
 CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION	 152
Summary of Study	153
Discussion of Results	155
Analysis of Research Question 1: To what extent does the CCSS influence middle school social teachers' decision making in the types of instructional strategies they choose to use in the classrooms?	156
Beliefs that Influence Teachers' Decision Making	157
Standardized Tests and the Implementation of the CCSS	159
CCSS are Best Practices	160
Overall Impact of CCSS on Teachers' Decision Making	161
Analysis of Research Question 2: What specific types of instructional strategies do middle school social studies teachers report to use when implementing the CCSS?	162
Analysis of Research Question 3: Do middle school social studies teachers feel adequately prepared to make decisions regarding the types of instructional strategies they choose to use to implement the CCSS in their classrooms?	167
Insufficient Teacher Education and Resources	169
Inconsistent Focus of the PLC	173

Analysis of Research Question 4: What instructional successes do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS in their classrooms?	175
Analysis of Research Question 5: What instructional challenges do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS in their classrooms?	175
Researcher Reflective Journal.....	178
Recommendations	179
Recommendations for Social Studies Teacher Education	180
Pre-Service Teacher Education.....	180
In-Service Professional Development	182
Specialized Instruction Resources	185
Recommendations for School District Personnel	186
Recommendations for Further Research	188
Conclusions and Implications	193
REFERENCES	197
APPENDICES	210
Appendix A: Chart Describing the Differences Between the NGSSS the CCSS.....	211
Appendix B: IRB Letter of Approval	214
Appendix C: Email Script for Recruiting Participants	216
Appendix D: Proposed Timeline	218
Appendix E: Informed Consent	221
Appendix F: Research Questions Crosswalk.....	225
Appendix G: Semi-Structured Interview #1 Protocol.....	228
Appendix H: Semi-Structured Interview #2 Protocol.....	230
Appendix I: Student Reflect and Predict Form.....	231

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1:	Demographic Data on Five Participants	81
Table 2:	Reported ELA Standards for History/Social Studies 6-8 Teachers Report to use while Implementing the CCSS	112
Table 3:	Reported Types of Instructional Strategies Teachers use while Implementing the CCSS	113
Table 4:	Reported Factors Participants Described for Feeling Inadequately Prepared to make Decisions Regarding the Instructional Strategies they choose to use while Implementing the CCSS	123
Table 5:	Extent in which Participants felt Successful while Implementing the CCSS	135
Table 6:	Extent in which Participants felt Challenged while Implementing the CCSS	139
Table 7:	Reported Challenges Teachers Expressed while Implementing the CCSS	139

ABSTRACT

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for social studies are based on critical thinking and literacy skills. These new mandates are expected to lead to curricular and instructional changes within social studies classes. This qualitative study explored how the CCSS might have impacted the curricular and instructional decision-making of middle school social studies teachers and ultimately how the CCSS might affect a teacher's gatekeeping role. As the CCSS initiative is fairly new, there is little research on the instructional practices being used to support the needs of teachers implementing these new standards in their classrooms as well as the processes, challenges, and successes teachers experience in addressing the CCSS in their classrooms. This study fills the gap of information lodged between a policy mandate and implementation in the classroom by contributing to the literature in the area of social studies education and the types of instruction social studies teachers may use to achieve the goals within the CCSS.

Data gleaned from this study demonstrates that the CCSS had an influence on teachers' instructional and curricular decision-making. CCSS influenced teachers' decision-making in three domains: teacher beliefs ((individual teacher's beliefs regarding the CCSS, including his or her personal beliefs regarding the CCSS and self-confidence to teach the skills associated with the CCSS), student assessment (the connection between standardized assessments and the CCSS), and best practices (recommended best practices by CCSS that were already being used in the classroom). As a result, teachers increased the number of the types of instructional strategies that focused on the critical thinking skills advocated by CCSS such as analyzing primary and

secondary sources and using evidence from multiple sources to complete a Document Based Question (DBQ). The study also revealed that teachers felt inadequately prepared to fully implement the CCSS in their classrooms due to insufficient teacher education geared to CCSS, resources, and inconsistencies of the focus of the CCSS within participants' Professional Learning Communities.

CHAPTER 1:

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Throughout my nine years teaching middle school social studies, I have witnessed numerous curricular changes at the national and state levels. When I began teaching in 2005, educators in Florida were required to implement the Florida Sunshine State Standards; just three years later, the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS) replaced them. The purpose of the NGSSS, as with most state standards, is to ensure that all students are learning essential social studies content and skills at key milestones in their schooling. The social studies NGSSS are heavily content driven with some emphasis on skills that students need to acquire. Most recently, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were adopted in 2010 in 43 states, the District of Columbia, and four territories and are now implemented in all Florida schools. The CCSS were implemented and adopted as an attempt to raise achievement levels and to get all students college and/or career ready. The CCSS for social studies are heavily based on critical thinking and literacy skills. For social studies educators, the implementation of CCSS were required alongside the existing NGSSS in their daily instruction; this necessitates an understanding of the new standards and knowledge of how to choose instructional strategies that effectively implement the CCSS within their classrooms. In 2014 the Florida Department of Education revised and renamed the CCSS and are now called the Florida Standards. For social studies the CCSS are “layered” on top of the NGSSS to create the Florida Standards. As a

practicing teacher, it has been clear to me that the curriculum and types of instruction I have used have been driven by the state standards and curriculum maps mandated by my school district.

Having attended the two-day, county training for Grade Level Content Leaders (GLCL) in the summer of 2013 and Marzano's Building Expertise Training that same summer in Orlando, Florida, I quickly realized the potential impact the CCSS would have on middle school social studies teachers. The first training focused on the role of the GLCL and how we would lead our group of grade level content teachers within our Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at our schools. I teach 7th and 8th grade social studies at a middle school located in West Central Florida. I am also the PLC Leader for the 7th grade Civics teachers. Much of the focus within our PLCs directly connects to the CCSS. One expectation of the PLC, for example, is to "unpack" the CCSS when we implement specific lessons and units. Learning how to unpack the CCSS is one of strategies learned in the GLCL training. Unpacking a standard is analyzing individual components so the teacher can better understand the meaning and intended goal of the standard. Through the unpacking process, teachers can presumably determine what students need to know, understand, and be able to do to be successful with each standard. This process is not necessarily new for teachers within my county since teachers have access to district-provided curriculum maps where the NGSSS have already been unpacked. However, the idea of unpacking standards oneself presumably gives teachers a much better understanding of the standard and provides a certain amount of autonomy in curricular and instructional decision-making.

As we went through the review and unpacking process in those summer workshops, I saw that there were clear differences between the NGSSS that social studies teachers had previously used and the CCSS. Since the CCSS for social studies were not primarily content-driven, it

became apparent to me that teachers would be expected to adapt their instructional practices to incorporate both the CCSS and the NGSSS (currently the *Florida Standards*). I also realized the importance of a teacher's understanding of the CCSS, since they were different from the NGSSS. As I sat in the training, I witnessed the frustration levels of some teachers as they were presented with the new CCSS mandates, considered how they would have to alter their instruction, and wondered what additional support mechanisms might be available when the school year started.

One expectation of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) is to collaborate with fellow teachers regarding instructional strategies that can be used to effectively implement the CCSS. Seventh grade Civics teachers are now responsible to prepare students for the Florida End-of-Course (EOC) assessment. The Civics EOC is a summative assessment created at the state level designed to measure student achievement of the NGSSS. Beginning in the 2013-2014 school year, students' scores on the Civics EOC assessment will constitute 30 percent of their final grade in the course. Regardless of the grade they have in the course, students must earn a passing score on the Civics EOC in order to pass the course and be promoted from middle school. There are remediation options if a student fails the Civics EOC assessment such as, retaking the course in the summer or retaking the exam to improve her or his overall course grade. Part of our PLC work is to select effective instructional strategies to ensure that learning is taking place and that students are prepared for the EOC exam. Time is allotted at each meeting for teachers to share best practices and to discuss strategies that have, or have not, worked in their classrooms.

The final expectation of the PLC is to create common assessments at the school level to measure student learning. Teachers discuss formative and summative assessments that can be used to determine a student's level of understanding individual standards. Teachers then use the

data to determine if further teaching needs to take place or if students are ready to move to another standard. Having common assessments at the school level promotes collaboration among teachers and ensures that all students in a given grade are learning the same content and skills.

The second teacher training workshop I attended in the summer of 2013 focused on the CCSS, Marzano's (2007) models of instruction, and the teacher evaluation system employed in my district. Marzano's models of instruction was used to help guide teachers through the CCSS and help prepare educators by providing strategies for how the CCSS should be implemented. As I sat through the sessions that focused on the CCSS, I realized that the level of critical thinking skills demanded of students is one clear shift from the NGSSS. The NGSSS for social studies primarily focuses on content with some focus on skills; however, the CCSS for social studies focuses purely on critical thinking and literacy skills with which many social studies teachers have not had experience. As a teacher of gifted students, I have attended various gifted education and Advanced Placement (AP) training sessions over the years; it became apparent to me during that summer training that many of the strategies recommended for successful implementation of the CCSS were very similar to the strategies discussed in professional development training for advanced learners. The link with AP is not a coincidence, I soon learned. David Coleman, president of College Board, was the chief architect of the CCSS. The College Board is promoting the CCSS in all they do. I remember thinking that staff development is going to be critical for the success of the CCSS. Teachers must engage in staff development in order to understand the standards as well as how to implement them.

The Marzano training also focused on the impact of the CCSS on teacher evaluation systems. The CCSS present new standards that will concomitantly change the way students will be assessed and, by extension, the way teachers will be evaluated. New standards mean new

standardized tests for students to take and new evaluation systems for teachers, especially in those school districts where teachers' assessments are linked to student achievement. The training also provided insight on the new types of student assessments that will be created to parallel the new standards.

The Common Core State Initiative --- essentially, two assessment consortia, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balance) --- are currently working to develop assessments that are aligned with the CCSS, with the central mission of assessing whether students are learning the skills needed to be college and/or career ready. Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman (2012) discuss how the standards are already affecting what is published, mandated, and tested in schools --- and also what is marginalized and neglected.

Almost as soon as the CCSS were released, the mainstream press began publishing reports, from both the political left and right, raising concerns about the new standards. Florida Governor Rick Scott reacted to both conservative and liberal concerns that the federal government had too much control over state and local education. Gov. Scott eventually ordered the state to pull out of the consortium of states developing Common Core tests and called for a series of public hearings that prompted state education officials to revise the CCSS, renaming them the Florida Standards (McGory, 2014).

Shortly after the hearings, the Florida Department of Education released a list of proposed changes to CCSS. The list included 13 changes to the English/Language Arts (ELA) standards and 33 changes to the math standards, nine of which are new standards (O'Connor, 2014). Critics eventually decided the changes to the CCSS were mostly cosmetic, changing some of the wording within some of the standards (McGory, 2014) and the state continued with steps

to incorporate the standards into the mandated state curriculum. The Common Core Standards Initiative website continues to list Florida as a state that has adopted the standards. Despite the fact that the standards are now called the Florida Standards, teachers within my county and other counties within the state still refer to the Florida Standards as the Common Core State Standards since the differences between the CCSS and the Florida Standards are negligible. Once again, for social studies the CCSS are “layered” on top of the NGSSS to create the Florida Standards.

These new mandates are expected to lead to curricular and instructional changes within social studies classes. But what kinds of changes? To what degree? Who will determine what these changes are? And how will these changes impact daily instruction? This study proposes that these changes will impact the types of instructional strategies social studies teachers choose to use in their classrooms and, ultimately, the kind of knowledge and skills students will develop.

There are many factors that influence teachers’ decisions regarding the types of instructional practices they choose to use in their classrooms. Teachers often examine the academic strengths and weaknesses of the students they have in their classrooms: students’ reading and writing levels based on standardized assessments, native language ability, disabilities, and special needs all play a role in the types of instructional strategies teachers implement in their classes. But another factor that influences teachers’ decisions on the types of instruction they choose are the mandated national and state standards in their subject area. As they make their final decisions regarding what types of instructional strategies will be most effective for the students in their classrooms, mandated curriculum standards must be addressed in their lesson and unit planning.

In the state of Florida, the shifts that needs to occur regarding the types of instructional strategies used in social studies classrooms will be, in large part, based on how different the

CCSS are from the NGSSS (see Appendix A). Through this research, I examined how the implementation of the CCSS affects the instructional decision-making of middle school social studies teachers and how the CCSS affects a teacher's instructional gatekeeping role.

Gatekeeping encompasses the decisions teachers make about curriculum and instruction and the criteria they use to make those decisions (Thornton, 2005, p.1).

Background/Rationale

With the addition of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), adopted in 2010 by 43 states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity, social studies teachers are expected to modify the way they teach to ensure that students meet the CCSS. In the state of Florida, the CCSS are concurrent with the NGSSS (Florida Standards) that social studies teachers are required to teach; the first year of full implementation is the current 2014-2015 school year.

My interest in the CCSS was sparked by the two previously discussed teacher trainings that I attended during the summer of 2013. Throughout both workshops I began to understand the vast differences between previously-taught Florida social studies standards and the newly adopted CCSS, realizing that if social studies educators are going to successfully teach the CCSS, there should be a shift in the way social studies is taught. Given the significant resources, professional staff development, and legislative mandates afforded to the CCSS initiative, it is anticipated that the CCSS will shape middle school curriculum and instructional practices in the foreseeable future. The instructional strategies used to teach social content are expected to be adjusted since the CCSS are heavily based on critical thinking and literacy skills --- this in itself will cause a shift in the way social studies content is taught. Additionally, the CCSS emphasize

non-fiction texts, evidence-based writing, and deeper, more conceptual understandings, all of which should impact social studies instruction.

The purpose of this research study was to examine how the implementation of the CCSS might affect the instructional decision making of middle school social studies teachers. As a practicing social studies teacher myself who understands the differences between the NGSSS and the CCSS, I feel teachers will have to infuse more literacy-based, higher order critical thinking methodologies within their classrooms such as a greater emphasis on analyzing primary and secondary sources, problem-based learning, and inquiry-based approaches to teaching. This research can benefit practicing social studies teachers within Florida school districts as well as other states and school districts with similar mandates. This study may also assist in professional development efforts by informing teacher educators and school district personnel about the processes, challenges, and successes teachers experience in addressing the CCSS in their classrooms. My research will inform social studies teacher education programs at the college level regarding the CCSS by examining the shift in curricular and instructional practice. This study also seeks to close the gaps within the research, contributing to the literature in the area of social studies education and the types of instruction social studies teachers may use to achieve the goals within the CCSS.

Statement of Problem

With the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards, social studies teachers in Florida are expected to shift the way they teach the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards in their classrooms to ensure that students are successfully achieving the CCSS, given the vast differences between the two. With the implementation and adoption of the CCSS, as an attempt to raise achievement levels and to get all students to be college and/or career ready, there

is little research on the instructional practices being used to support the needs of teachers implementing these new standards in their classrooms. My proposed study seeks to identify how the implementation of the CCSS might affect the instructional decision-making of middle school social studies teachers.

Theoretical Framework

Despite curriculum mandates, teachers are the ultimate decision makers in the classroom. Thornton (2008) explains, “As gatekeepers, teachers make the educational decisions in the place where they ultimately count: the classroom” (p.1). I used Thornton’s theory on Instructional Gatekeeping to guide my research. Thornton (2008) states that the realization by theorists, researchers, and policymakers of the prominence of the teacher’s gatekeeping role in educational reform is fairly new. As instructional and curricular gatekeepers, teachers make many decisions as to what material will be taught and how that material will be presented in the classroom. While teachers have a specific curriculum to follow throughout the school year, it is up to the teacher to determine what exactly will be taught and how the material will be presented. Teachers are ultimately the people who make the decisions on what specific strategies will be executed in the classroom.

Thornton (1991) describes teachers as gatekeepers who make the everyday decisions concerning both the subject matter and the experiences to which students are exposed. Gatekeeping encompasses the decisions teachers make about curriculum and instruction and the criteria they use to make those decisions. Teachers consider a number of factors as they plan for instruction: the students sitting in their classrooms, the mandated curriculum standards, and the content of their disciplines. “Researchers point to a long list of factors that influence teachers’ pedagogical decisions. State-level tests make that list, but joining them are a host of other factors

including personal considerations, organizational constraints, and policy issues” (Grant, 2007, p.252). Many factors can play a potential role on the decisions that teachers make regarding curriculum and instruction such as mandated federal and state standards, standardized tests, the student population in their classrooms, and personal factors:

The personal factors that influence teachers’ decision making include their subject matter knowledge and beliefs as well as their personal relationships and experiences. The education that teachers have already experienced in history and the social sciences influences their pedagogical thoughts and actions (Grant, 2007, p.252).

Teachers need to be cognizant of how and why they select the instructional strategies they use in their classrooms. With the implementation of the CCSS, the role of the teacher as an instructional gatekeeper is expected to be impacted. In the state of Florida, not only do social studies teachers have to implement the NGSSS, which focuses on content, they now also have to implement the CCSS, which focuses heavily on thinking, reading, and writing skills [now called the Florida Standards]. I explored how and to what degree the new CCSS might affect the role of the social studies teacher as an instructional gatekeeper. Ultimately, as Thornton (1989) describes, “as the curricular-instructional gatekeeper, the teacher makes the crucial decisions concerning content, sequence, and instructional strategy that determine the social studies experiences of students” (p. 4).

Research Questions

The questions guiding this research are:

- 1) To what extent does the CCSS influence the middle school social studies teachers' decision making in the types of instructional strategies they choose to use in their classrooms?
- 2) What specific types of instructional strategies do middle school social studies teachers report to use when implementing the CCSS?
- 3) To what extent do middle school social studies teachers feel adequately prepared to make decisions regarding the types of instructional strategies they choose to use to implement the CCSS in their classrooms?
- 4) What instructional successes do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS into their classrooms?
- 5) What instructional challenges do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS into their classrooms?

Assumptions

- 1) Teachers know what the Common Core State Standards are and what they encompass.
- 2) Teachers in the state of Florida know the differences between the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards and the CCSS.
- 3) The implementation of the CCSS will affect the types of instructional practices in social studies classrooms.
- 4) Teachers are the ultimate decision makers when choosing appropriate and effective instructional strategies employed in their classrooms.

Operational Definition of Terms

Next Generation Sunshine State Standards will be defined as standards that, “Establish the core content of the curricula to be taught in this state and that specify the core content knowledge and skills that K-12 public school students are expected to acquire” (Florida Department of Education, 2010).

Common Core State Standards will be defined as the standards that are designed to be, “Robust and relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers” (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2012, Homepage).

Florida Standards will be defined as for social studies the CCSS “layered” on top of the NGSSS and will be defined as the standards that will, “Equip students with the knowledge and skills they need to be ready for careers and college-level coursework” (Florida Standards College & Career Ready, 2014, Homepage).

Instructional strategies will be defined as, "Different types of activities needed in order to achieve a desired instructional objective" (Hatfield, 1973, p.4).

Instructional decisions will be defined as, “Deciding how to teach within some explicit or implicit frame of reference” (Shaver, 1979, p. 21).

Gatekeeping will be defined as, “Encompassing the decisions teachers make about curriculum and instruction and the criteria used to make those decisions” (Thornton, 2005, p.1)

Appendix A provides an example of a current 6th, 7th, and 8th grade social studies unit of study and the NGSSS and CCSS required for each unit. The chart is provided to illustrate the differences between the NGSSS (heavily content-based) and the CCSS (primarily skill-based). A brief description of the NGSSS and CCSS is provided in Appendix A.

Limitations

A possible limitation of my study is the small sample of participants. The sampling within this study is purposeful and one of convenience; as such, it is not designed to be generalizable across all school districts or states. For this study I used participants from one school within Florida to control for variance. However, some participants may have more experience and a better understanding of the CCSS compared to other participants within this study. As a result, these participants' responses and the levels of incorporating instructional strategies to implement the CCSS varied. Another limitation of this study was not conducting participant observations. For this study I conducted three semi-structured open-ended interviews and observations were not used as a data collection method. I was collecting data based on what participants reported not based on what I actually witnessed.

CHAPTER 2:

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

“Because economic progress and educational achievement go hand in hand, educating every American student to graduate prepared for college and success in a new work force is a national imperative. Meeting this challenge requires that state standards reflect a level of teaching and learning needed for students to graduate ready for success in college and careers.”

*U.S. President Barack Obama
White House Statement
February 22, 2010*

Since the creation of the first American schools in the 17th century, educators have been at the mercy of constant policy changes, which endlessly affect what should be taught within our classrooms. There are constant curricular changes within the American education system for which teachers across all content areas have to be prepared for. Policy makers within the United States are continuously trying to find new ways to effectively prepare all students within the nation to be prepared for success in post-secondary school settings and/or successful in the work place. Students are continually being prepared to compete and thrive in today’s global economy. Throughout the past decade and a half, educators have seen policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (2001) and Race to the Top (2009) adopted to raise achievement levels, lessen learning gaps, insure that all children in the United States will be able to read and write proficiently, and guarantee that all students be able to succeed in any setting ---college or workplace ---after the completion of twelfth grade. Teachers have a set of state standards to

guide the content and skills that students should be learning. Troia and Olinghouse (2013) explain that content standards are created to inform curriculum development, guide instruction and assessment, provide goals for student achievement, and raise achievement levels. However, there has been much debate over the consistency and rigor among many of these state standards. Porter, McMaken, Hwang, and Yang (2011) state that the CCSS, led by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, were developed as a state-led effort to establish a consensus on expectations for student knowledge and critical thinking skills in grades K-12.

Kober and Rentner (2011) explain that the state-led initiative to develop these standards grew out of concerns that the current discrepancies among the different standards in every state is not adequately preparing students in our highly mobile society with the knowledge and skills needed to compete globally. The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is an attempt to prepare students to compete and succeed in a global market and to be college and/or career ready. “The Common Core State Standards recognize that to thrive in the newly wired world, students need to master new ways of reading and writing” (Kist, 2013, p. 38). Now with the adoption of the CCSS, almost all states within our country will fully implement a new set of standards within our education system. The question remains, however, how these curriculum standards will be put into practice:

In the end, the most important aspect of the Common Core State Standards is the part that has yet to be figured out: the implementation. As challenging as it must have been to write and to finesse the adoption of this document, that work is nothing compared to the work of teaching in ways to bring all students to these ambitious expectations (Calkins et al., 2012, p.13).

Teachers may be faced with implementation challenges in response to the new policy changes. Gross, Giacuinta, and Bernstein (1971) identify four obstacles to effective policy implementation at the school level: lack of understanding of the policy change, inadequate skills necessary to effectively implement the new policy, lack of resources, and inconsistencies in organizational arrangements. What will this mean for middle school social studies teachers? Will they be prepared and ready to adapt to a new set of standards common across the nation? Some scholars are not convinced: “Failure to understand the standards and adjust practices accordingly will likely result in ‘same old, same old teaching with only superficial connections to the grade level standards. In that case, their promise to enhance student performance will not be realized” (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013, p.26). Giving teachers necessary staff development, training, and time to understand the changes will be a key component in the success of the CCSS.

It is imperative that educators understand the intent and structure of the Standards in order to work with them most effectively. Accordingly, we recommend that schools set the expectation and schedule the time for staff to read and discuss the Standards, beginning with the “front matter,” not the grade-level Standards (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013, p.26).

Educators know that the changes brought forth by the CCSS, such as the heavy focus on critical thinking and literacy skills, will most likely impact the ways teachers approach curriculum and instruction. Tobin (2014) claims that, according to the state of Florida, from here on out teaching will look very different in Florida schools and what is expected of students and teachers will be different from the past. Alberti (2012) states that the English Language Arts (ELA) and Literacy standards include expectations in reading, writing, speaking, and listening that will apply to not only English classes but also in social studies, science and technical courses as well. Students

will be reading more nonfiction and informational texts, the reading material will be more complex, and teachers will need to shift their focus to other higher order reading strategies.

Tobin (2014) goes on to discuss that students will also be expected to write more frequently and at higher levels. Students will need to support their thinking with evidence and factual information gleaned from texts provided.

To make the transition easier, Calkins et al. (2012), suggest that school leaders examine what their schools are currently doing. Leaders should examine what systems are already in place and working well and use those same systems to support the CCSS. Leaders within schools need to focus on the school's strengths, draw on what teachers are already doing that matches the priorities of the CCSS, and then spend more time refining and strengthening those ongoing initiatives. Best practices within the school should be shared so more teachers can increase their level of effectiveness. "To implement the CCSS, then identify the strong teaching practices and innovations that are already present in your school, looking especially for the practices that could lift the level of learning not only in one discipline but across many" (Calkins et al., 2012, p. 18). Adding new programs to schools with each and every new reform movement adopted does not always yield positive results; it can increase the level of frustration on the teachers and students within the school.

A Brief History of the Standard-Based Reform Movement

Throughout the existence of the American education system, educators and policymakers have consistently tried to improve various aspects of schooling, such as raising achievement levels and creating equal educational opportunities for students. As early as the 19th century during the Common School Movement, school reformers believed that education could solve the problems of political stability and equal opportunity for all citizens. There have been many

attempts to ameliorate educational conditions since the Common School Movement; however, during the 1980s creating state and/ or national standards as an avenue to improve educational inequalities and raise achievement levels gained significant support.

Criticism of the American public school system had been mounting since the beginning of the Cold War in 1947 and reached a crescendo when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik in 1957. Bracey (2008) states that the media blamed schools for letting the Russians reach space first, even though the United States had a satellite-capable rocket in the air a year prior. Many education reports were sparked by Sputnik and the alleged failure of schools. In several important ways, this singular event propelled the standard-based movement in the United States.

Throughout the 1960s both John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson expressed an interest in promoting equal opportunity and decreasing the number of people living in poverty. Both presidents allocated a tremendous amount of money to fight poverty; education was one area that received targeted funds. Programs such as Head Start, Job Corps, subsidized school lunches, and Title One were all established during this time period (Gelbrich, 1999). Also during this time period, teachers were prompted to take a more student-centered approach in their classrooms. Gelbrich (1999) discusses that teachers were encouraged to be creative and to make education more interesting by giving students choices and providing individualized instruction.

The 1970s saw increased concern over students' achievement and academic progress compared to previous time periods. In 1975 the *New York Times* published the nation's average SAT scores, which revealed a steady decline over a ten-year span (Ravitch 2011). Minority students' scores were on average lower than their white counterparts. The American school system was criticized for unequal educational opportunities and not fully preparing all students. Soon thereafter, a clarion call was again made to improve American education.

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk (ANAR)* was published by the National Commission on Excellence and Education, criticizing American schools for their mediocre preparation of students. Wixson, Dutro, and Athan (2003) describe the document as using colorful language to deplore the state of American education, which led to policy debates about how to raise expectations for both student and teacher performance. The report recommended a tougher set of academic basics for high school graduation, higher standards at universities, longer school days and years, merit pay for top teachers, and more citizen participation. This report has had a lasting impact on social studies education and the American education system as a whole. “The report motivated more significant changes in the manner in which American K-12 public schools conduct business than virtually any event or condition preceding it” (Wong, Guthrie, & Harris, 2014, p.20).

Soon after, Goodlad’s (1984) *A Place Called School* was published, documenting “a lack of clear expectations of student learning objectives that could be used to guide instruction and curriculum” (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008, p.17). The concern for having a clear set of expectations added to the growing interest in creating standards to improve education.

Three years later, *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century. The Report of the Task Force on Teaching as a Profession*, was published by the Carnegie Corporation (1986.) The Carnegie Corporation, established in 1911, has as its mission "to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding" among the people of the United States (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2014). *A Nation Prepared* raised concerns about not having high quality teachers to support the needs of the nation. Further, it stressed that U.S. schools needed to have the majority of students graduate with high achievement levels for the country to have a strong democracy and to stop the growth of the underclass. A plan was presented to restructure

schools and redefine teaching. Included in the plan were raising the standards for teachers, restructuring teachers' salaries and job opportunities, and creating a professional setting for teachers to decide how best to meet goals for their students as well as being held accountable for student learning. The standard-based reform movement was prompted by such reports.

Mathis (2010) discusses one such reform prompted by these reports. U.S. President George H.W. Bush met with the National Business Roundtable leaders in 1989, and together they set forth what they considered to be the nine essential components of a high-quality education system, including standards, assessments, and accountability. Also in 1989, President Bush called the first education summit, at which governors agreed to set national goals and pledged support for state-based reform initiatives. Ravitch (1995) states in 1992 the U.S. Department of Education made grants for leading groups of teachers and scholars to create voluntary national standards; history, geography, and civics were among the list. The Bush administration wanted any national standards and assessments that were created to be voluntary. In 1994, Ravitch (1995) goes on to state Congress passed a law intended to begin the process of creating national content and performance standards. States would still be responsible for creating their own assessments and systems of accountability.

Under the Clinton administration a law was passed that stated, states should write their own standards, create their own assessments aligned with their standards, and be held accountable for achievement (Ravitch, 2011). The Clinton administration's Goals 2000 gave states federal money to write their own academic standards. They also passed legislation to assure the voluntary nature of the national standards that were created; in turn, The National Education Standards and Improvement Council was formed to certify national standards produced by professional accrediting bodies. By the early 2000s, every state in the U.S. had

adopted a system of standards, assessments, and a system of accountability to promote school improvement (Hamilton et al., 2008).

McLaughlin and Shepard (1995) explain that rather than holding students accountable to minimum acceptable levels of competency, the national standards-based reform movement that emerged in the 1990s called for "high standards for all students" based on challenging subject matter, higher-order thinking skills, and the application of abstract knowledge to solve real-world problems. Educators were for the most part not represented in these two efforts. As a result, standards-making shifted from the professional sphere to a business-influenced political domain.

Supporters of the standard-based movement argue that providing clear goals on what students should learn will improve achievement levels and are necessary for equality of opportunity. Standards define what teachers and schools are trying to accomplish and can raise the quality of education by creating clear expectations. Ravitch (1996) posits that standards also ensure that students in all schools have access to the same challenging programs and courses regardless of where they live. Ravitch goes on to discuss that if educators fail to agree on what children should learn, they have failed to identify their most fundamental goals and the decision will be left to textbook publishers, test makers, and interest groups.

Most standard-based reform movements include high-stakes testing and assessment programs, which policy makers believe will increase student achievement and hold teachers accountable for that growth. This can be seen in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2001, holding schools accountable for results, giving states and districts more flexibility in how they spend federal money, using scientific research to guide classroom practice, and involving parents by giving them information and choices about their children's education. Ravitch (2011) argues under NCLB, test-based accountability---not standards---became our national education policy:

“there was no underlying vision of what education should be or how one might improve schools” (p.20). Ravitch has drastically changed her viewpoints over the course of the years regarding the standard-based reform movement and currently feels it undermines the American education system.

Marzano, Yanoski, Hoegh, and Simms (2013) state that due to the loose interpretation of the policies created by NCLB, states were left to determine what students were going to learn, how they would be tested, and what levels of achievement determined proficiency. This caused inconsistencies between state standards, which led to inconsistencies between what teachers were teaching, what children across the nation were learning, and at what levels they were learning. Another potential problem with some of the earlier standard-based reform movements, as Marzano and Haystead (2008) discuss, was that the standards contained too much content and that there were too many standards. This can also lead to inconsistencies in student learning created by teachers removing certain content and standards from the curriculum due to a shortage of time.

Other scholars charged that the NCLB mandates seemed to be piecemeal: “Another problem with standards implementation is that it can result in a fragmented curriculum organized around addressing isolated standards as opposed to an integrated, well-balanced curriculum that builds increasingly sophisticated connections and understanding between units” (Beach, Thein, & Webb, 2012, p.12). Teachers can also have a misunderstanding of the standards when there are too many to implement.

Some educators also complain of tightly scripted curricula that do not allow for much teacher autonomy. Teachers may begin to teach from predetermined scripts and/or predetermined curriculum guides that can stifle creativity as well as lead to teachers not taking into

consideration special populations of children in their classes. Kohn (2010) states that a standards-based approach can result in the homogenization of instruction in which teachers teach the same content using the same methods regardless of differences in the students in their classrooms.

The Common Core State Standard (CCSS) initiative was launched in 2009 by the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association in response to some of the failures of previous standard-based reform initiatives. (Hiebert & Pearson (2012) put it this way: “It’s better to think of the Common Core movement not as a reversal of NCLB, but as the next step on a journey toward close, critical reading and powerful writing” p. 49).

Larson (2012) suggests looking at the standards from a historical perspective to make the outcome of implementing the CCSS better than the reform movement that preceded it.

A continued focus on the Content Standards, without a congruent focus on instruction, is likely to—at best—result in continued incremental growth in student learning and, based on history, may fail to have the desired effect on student learning differentials (p.112).

Larson stresses that if only a narrow concentration of attention on content standards characterizes the CCSS reform effort, then it is likely to become just another failed attempt at an education reform movement.

A Brief History of the Common Core State Standards

One major downfall of the standards-based reform movement has been that content-based state standards are inconsistent across the country, although the level at which states use the content state standards varies. Herczog (2010) argues that the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are in direct response to inconsistencies among individual states and how they use their state standards. She points out that states use their standards for many different purposes within

education. Schmidt & Burroughs (2012) state that if the ambitions of the CCSS initiative are realized, for the first time almost every public school K-12 student in the United States will be exposed to roughly the same content.

Often they drive assessments, instruction, and the instructional materials that are used; others use the state standards as mere recommendations to allow local interpretation and control. The main difference between current state standards and the CCSS seems to be that the new standards are explicitly designed around the goal of guaranteeing college and/or career readiness for all students (Rothman, 2012a). The question remains if this is an attainable goal.

Rothman (2012a) discusses that the variation in state standards can be seen within discrepancies between the results of state assessments and the results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

For example, in 2005 87 percent of 4th graders in Tennessee were proficient on the state test in mathematics, but only 28 percent were proficient on NAEP. In contrast, in Massachusetts, 40 percent of 4th graders were proficient on the state test in mathematics and almost the same proportion (41 percent) were proficient on the NAEP (p. 11).

Rothman (2012a) goes on to discuss that in 2009 this data prompted the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) to develop standards that would be common among states, reduce variability, and make sure the expectations matched what is called for in post-secondary education. The CCSS were ostensibly put in place to ensure that all students across the nation would be college or career ready by the time they left high school. The creators of the new standards were comprised of representatives from Achieve, American College Testing (ACT), and the College Board. First, these designers created *anchor standards* for college and career readiness in English language arts and mathematics, which

would indicate the knowledge and skills students needed at the end of high school. Second, *grade-by-grade standards* in English language arts and mathematics, which would guide students to the anchor standards, were also created. By developing the college and/or career readiness standards, the authors defined readiness as having the potential to succeed in entry-level, academic college courses and in career training programs (Rothman, 2012a).

While creating the standards, developers started with evidence from postsecondary education and the workplace to guide them through the process. In December 2008, The National Governors Association (NGA), The Council of Chief State School Officers (CSSO), and Achieve, released *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education*, recommending states to upgrade their standards by adopting the CCSS to ensure that students are provided the necessary knowledge and skills to be globally competitive. The report provides data about American students such as 15-year-olds in the United States rank 25th in math and 21st in science achievement on most international assessments. The report also notes that U.S. schooling ranks high in inequality, with students from different socioeconomic backgrounds having the third largest gap in science scores (NGA, 2008). Based on this report, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were scoring lower on science standardized tests and the authors feel this could be due to unequal educational opportunities. NGA (2008) also provides data such as in 2006 the United States ranked 14th in college and university graduation rates and had the 2nd highest college dropout rate of 27 countries. NGA (2008) goes on to provide statistics such as from 1969-1999 the share of jobs requiring more education and specialized skills has increased from 23 percent to 33 percent. More sophisticated skill demands within jobs are changing and on the rise requiring workers to:

Bring facts and relationships to bear in problem solving, the ability to judge when one

problem-solving strategy is not working and another should be tried, and the ability to engage in complex communication with others along with foundational skills in math and reading (NGA, 2008, p. 9).

The report provided data for the developers that expressed the need for a set of rigorous standards that were going to improve achievement levels, prepare students for college and/or career readiness, and provide students with the skills to succeed in the competitive global market. Rothman (2012a) states the creators also conducted their own research by examining introductory college textbooks and studying the kinds of reading and mathematics students were expected to know and do in their first year of college.

Common Core State Standards Initiative (2014) states that in September 2009, the CCSSO and NGA released a draft of the college and career ready standards on which the public could comment. They received roughly 10,000 comments on the standards during two public comment meetings. The drafting process relied on teachers and standards experts across the country to help shape the final version of the CCSS; some were part of Work Groups and Feedback groups for the content standards; organizations such as the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers brought together teachers to provide specific feedback on the standards; teachers comprised teams to provide regular feedback on drafts of the standards; and teachers provided input during the two public comment meetings.

In March 2010 the CCSSO and NGA released a draft of the K-12 grade-by-grade college and career readiness standards for the public to comment on. Once again, educators were offered the opportunity to provide comments on the standards. In June 2010, the CCSSO and the NGA released the final draft of the CCSS. Finally, in 2011-2012, U.S. states and territories began their own processes for reviewing, adopting, and ratifying the adoption of the CCSS.

Rothman (2012a) describes how the process of creating the CCSS was very different from the process of how many states created their standards, which Rothman feels was part of the problem with the inconsistencies present in the state standards. In the past, the process often involved logrolling, the informal practice of exchanging favors to gain political support; the result was a list of standards that may have had nothing to do with college and career readiness, but were included for political expediency.

As Marzano et al. (2013) states, the adoption of the CCSS was voluntary. Even though the adoption was voluntary and states were not forced to implement the standards, there was an incentive to those states that did. Marzano et al., (2013) further discusses the federal government strongly encouraged states to adopt the CCSS by making it a factor that determined their application status for federal education funding in Race to the Top. Gewertz (2012) states that due to the recession many states adopted the standards to receive part of the \$4 billion Race to the Top funds. Klein (2014) also points out that the Department of Education made adoption of college-and career- ready standards a requirement for states that wanted a waiver from the NCLB Act.

The CCSS were meant to lay out *what* all students across the nation should know and what needed to be taught at each level, but not *how* teachers should teach the content and skills. As an example, the CCSS specifies that students should be able to “Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources” (CCSS ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1). However, neither the topic nor the method by which teachers are to assist students in meeting this standard is mandated. Therefore the CCSS should be accompanied by a well-developed, content-rich curriculum consistent with the expectations laid out in the document. As Porter and colleagues (2011) put it, the CCSS “are explicit in their focus on what students are to learn, what

we call here ‘the content of the intended curriculum,’ and not on how that content is to be taught, what often is referred to as ‘pedagogy and curriculum’ (p. 103). This point is often heard in professional development events. In the county where I teach, it has been stated during the 2013-2014 school year that the CCSS are not supposed to dictate *how* teachers should teach but, rather, the *skills* they should teach.

While the CCSS have a focus on mathematics and language arts, there are also specific standards intended for social studies instruction. Beach et al., (2012) state that the CCSS reflect the value of reading across content areas and added more reading standards for social studies and science. Social studies teachers have been teaching reading and writing within their classrooms for quite some time; however, the level at which they will be teaching reading and writing skills are expected to change due to the CCSS.

The academic rigor and the expectation that all students are college/career ready associated with the CCSS is expected to bring changes in the way teachers approach curriculum and instruction. “The major work of implementing the Common Core State Standards takes place after the standards have been adopted, as states tackle complementary changes in curriculum, assessment, professional development, and other areas” (Kober & Rentner, 2011, p. 5). Change in instructional practice is inevitable if teachers are going to be consistent across all states and successfully prepare all students for college or any other career path. Ensuring that high school graduates have learned the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college and career will require coordination between the elementary, secondary, and higher education systems (Kober & Rentner, 2011). Further, school districts should develop teacher evaluation systems geared to the Common Core State Standards and find funding to support implementation of the standards.

As previously discussed, in the state of Florida the CCSS are now called the Florida Standards. In late 2013, Governor Scott began to receive political backlash over the adoption of the CCSS. Conservatives and liberals criticized the CCSS and stated that the federal government had too much control over state and local education. After holding public hearings late 2013, the Florida Department of Education revised the CCSS. They changed some of the phrasing of existing standards, added new standards, and removed none of the standards resulting in a similar set of standards with a different name. At this time Gov. Scott also ordered the state to pull out of consortium of states developing Common Core tests. Opponents of the CCSS have criticized Scott, charging that, “The Florida Standards are actually the Common Core with the addition of 98 items, mostly related to cursive handwriting and calculus instruction” (Solocheck, 2014). Solocheck (2014) also states that there were only minor revisions made to the standards and the Florida State Board of Education removed nothing. Other supporters of the CCSS disagreed with the revisions since the CCSS were supposed to be a national initiative creating more consistency of what was being taught across the nation. “Common Core is supposed to be a national benchmark for education, allowing for an easier transition for a child who moves between states. However, Scott wants Florida to have its own Common Core standards” (Savage, 2014). Even though portions of the CCSS wording has been revised, standards have been added, and the name has been changed, teachers within my county and many other counties in Florida still refer to the new standards as the Common Core which makes for confusion. There are also inconsistencies between how the standards are presented on the state’s website and the district’s website. The state’s website takes teachers to a website named CPALMS to find the Florida Standards. CPLAMS is an online toolbox where teachers can find resources to help them implement the Florida Standards. The Florida Standards for social studies are essentially the

NGSSS and the CCSS combined. The district's Canvas Secondary Learning Network Middle 2015-2016 website provides social studies curriculum maps with both the NGSSS and CCSS listed as two separate entities which also makes for confusion.

The NCSS Position Statement on the Common Core State Standards

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) was created in 1921. The purpose was to bring about the association and cooperation of teachers of social studies and others interested in promoting an engaged citizenry through social studies. The creation of NCSS reflected the growing notion that the teaching of history alone was not adequate preparation for citizenship in an increasingly complex society.

In 1992 the NCSS created a Task Force on Standards for Social Studies to examine the social studies curriculum. The Task Force issued a report, *Expectations of Excellence: Curriculum Standards of the Social Studies* (1992). This report was intended to influence and guide curriculum design and overall student expectations for grades K-12 social studies. The standards created in 1994 established the ten basic themes for the social studies. The ten themes are: Culture, Time, Continuity, and Change, People, Places, and Environments, Individual Development and Identity, Individuals, Groups, and Institutions, Power, Authority, and Governance, Production, Distribution and Consumption, Science, Technology, and Society, Global Connections, and finally, Civic Ideals and Practices. The standards provide a framework for what should occur in a K-12 social studies program. Robert J. Stahl (1994), the president of NCSS in 1994-1995, explained that perhaps initially conforming to the spirit of the social studies standards, NCSS gave the social studies greater weight than was customary in previous NCSS curriculum position statements. Steven A. Goldberg (2010), the president of NCSS in 2010-

2011, argues that in this post-NCLB era, it is imperative that NCSS provide a framework to increase the quality of instruction and student social studies knowledge and skills.

Currently, the NCSS approves of and supports the CCSS initiative for three main reasons. First, NCSS (2009) asserts that all students across the nation deserve a rigorous social studies education that will prepare them to be competent and responsible citizens. Second, the criteria for effectively teaching and learning social studies vary from state to state and need to be consistent. Last, prior federal reform initiatives such as NCLB have left social studies marginalized in many schools across the nation. Given the CCSS's stated goals, it is believed that the new standards would support the broader social studies education field. The following is the NCSS official position on the CCSS.

NCSS urges the President of the United States, the leadership of the United States Department of Education, the National Governors Association's (NGA) Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) to support development and establishment of Common Core Standards for Social Studies that will: bring together social studies experts from the National Council for the Social Studies, its affiliate organizations and other professional organizations to develop and review common core social studies standards that underscore the critical importance of social studies as an indispensable aspect of every child's educational experience, and demonstrate the need for social studies to be adopted by the U.S. Department of Education and individual states and territories as an essential part of any core curriculum, and be framed by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills to include critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills in the context of civic

literacy, economic/financial literacy, and global awareness, and thereby advance the cause of student success in the social studies in order that they become competent, responsible citizens and productive working members in domestic and international society (NCSS , 2009)

Herczog (2010) states the CCSS are designed to create citizens that have the knowledge and critical thinking and problem solving skills to succeed in our global economy and society; the NCSS standards for selecting and organizing knowledge for purposes of teaching and learning seem to go hand in hand with CCSS. Both the NCSS and the CCSS have similar goals in promoting critical thinking skills that promote civic competence in the 21st century.

The Arguments for the Common Core State Standards

With the adoption of any new reform movement in education, there are always educators and researchers that provide reasons why they advocate or support the initiative. The Common Core State Standards are no different. “Unprecedented efforts are underway to ensure that this round of standards reform, unlike past efforts, will really make a difference” (Rothman, 2012c, p.18). Advocates such as Rothman (2012a), Haycock (2012), the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) (2012), and David Castillo and Josef Lukan from the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) (2011) feel that the CCSS will assist in preparing students for the challenges of college or career, stating that a large proportion of U.S. high school graduates are not prepared for the future. Advocates also argue that the CCSS will prepare all students for whatever path they choose in the future, suggesting that they will be college and/or career ready and will be able to compete in the global market. Haycock (2012) states that if implemented well, the CCSS schools will raise their sights for all children, engaging all of them, “rather than just a privileged few---deeply and meaningfully in rich and rigorous content that will

prepare them for college and careers”. Williams (2014) discusses how Bill Gates (whose philanthropic foundation provided millions of dollars to help develop Common Core), wrote in *USA Today* that “the standards are inspired by a simple and powerful idea: Every American student should leave high school with the knowledge and skills to succeed in college and in the job market” (p.6). ASCD (2012) states that due to the global competitiveness of today’s world, a common set of high, college and career readiness standards makes more sense than ever before. ASCD has made it part of their mission to promote the CCSS and provide staff development opportunities so teachers will have a better understanding of the new standards. Castillo and Lukan (2011) discuss that NCLR (the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization) believes that the CCSS are part of the solution to improving education for Latino students, by providing all students with the same access to a rigorous curriculum that will prepare them for college and/or their future careers.

One of the main factors that prompted the CCSS were inconsistencies among state standards which led to differences between what was being taught and the level at which students were being taught, which ultimately lead to discrepancies among students; some were prepared for the future and some that were not. Rothman (2012a) further explains that the standards define some clear expectations for what students should know and be able to do and that these expectations are more closely aligned in several important ways with what students need to succeed in college and career. Porter et al. (2011) discusses that the CCSS would offer an opportunity to create a national curriculum that would offer benefits such as: shared academic expectations among students that live all across the country, a stronger focus than state standards, and efficiency that would allow states to create, share, and use the same high quality assessments and content standards.

Education Northwest (2010), and organization that works with school districts across the nation, describes that the CCSS clearly communicate with students, parents, and teachers, and school administrators what is expected of students at each grade level going on to state that a common set of standards ensures that all students, no matter where they live, can graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary education and careers. As Ginn (2010) points out:

In the past, each state set its own standards, some varying drastically. When students move from one state to another, there's often a problem with which classes transfer and which ones the student has to retake due to different standards. Colleges, universities and even employers can't be sure a high school graduate from Nevada will have the same skills as one from Ohio (p.16).

Kendall (2011) explains that it doesn't matter if teachers don't know each other or teach in another state, the teacher knows what skills students will need to be successful in your class. "Advocates argued that in this era of increased global competitiveness and family mobility, the country needed common academic metrics and goals that all students---whether living in Las Alamos or the Bronx---must measure up to and master" (Bell & Thatcher, 2012, p. 13). As a practicing teacher this can even be seen from one district to the next within the same state. When students have transferred to my school from other counties there has been a conflict among what students have been previously taught. "You don't need to spend time trying to bring students up to the first step because they're already there, ready for you to help them take the next step, and the next" (Kendall, 2011, p.10). The inconsistency between districts as to the implementation of the state standards is evident. Education Northwest (2010) explains that since the CCSS will be consistent from school to school, there will be many benefits to students and teachers who transfer from place to place. Learning expectations for students should be the same and a teacher

should be able to more easily understand the benchmarks. “With a successful adoption, states and districts will be able to share experiences and approaches, which may increase the capacity of all schools to teach their students to higher standards” (Education Northwest, 2010, p.4).

Advocates believe having common standards in place will assure that all students receive the same high quality education, reiterating consistency also across grade levels. This will also apply to social studies teachers to provide consistency within their classrooms. Consistency within social studies classes can also lead to higher levels of reading and writing: “The CCSS have provided an opportunity for social studies educators to re-frame literacy instruction in such a way as to allow social studies to regain a more balanced and elevated role in K-12 curriculum” (Lee & Swan, 2013, p.327).

Within the current Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS), which Florida social studies teachers are required to implement, there aren’t many standards that focus on higher order literacy skills. The majority of the NGSSS focuses on content and students are asked to do things such as recall, compare and contrast, and determine cause and effect. Through the curriculum and in-class instruction, social studies teachers can provide students with higher order thinking activities such as analyzing points of view, writing to persuade, and finding evidence from informational text to justify their positions.

Lee and Swan (2013) observe that content area reading and disciplinary literacy are two approaches that are conducted in social studies classes that support the literacy standards within the CCSS. They state that content area reading focuses on literacy skills such as making meaning, decoding, vocabulary development, and general comprehension. Lee and Swan (2013) also argue that the CCSS include a robust set of skills that should be the foundation for social studies literacy, going on to urge that the CCSS are fewer, higher, clearer, and push social studies

to be similarly well-defined in describing the skills and practices that are essential to the field. The CCSS will take literacy skills to a much higher level when compared to the current literacy skills in the NGSSS.

As stated the CCSS provide a set of standards that focus on higher level literacy skills within social studies. For example, CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1 (Common Core State Standard- English Language Arts Literacy Reading History grades 6-8 standard 1) states, “Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.” It is a best practice within social studies classrooms to have students cite primary and secondary sources and use such sources to help them understand what was taking place in time period, analyze different perspectives, and distinguish between accurate and inaccurate information. However, such a skill was not included in the previously adopted NGSSS. “States that have adopted the common standards most often cited the rigor of the standards and their potential to guide statewide education improvement as very important or important considerations in their decision” Kober & Rentner, 2011, p.1).

The Arguments against the Common Core State Standards

Just as there are educators and researchers advocating new initiatives in education, there are also educators and researchers who provide reasons why they oppose or do not support an initiative. Since the CCSS are so new, there is no research available yet of their successes and/or failures. Researchers are making predictions of the successes and failures of the CCSS based on standard-based movements of the past. Mathis (2010) expresses that the CCSS framers provide little research supporting the presumption that adopting standards necessarily leads to a more rigorous curriculum to better prepare students for college. Mathis (2010) discusses how research support for standards-driven, test-based accountability systems is similarly weak and that nations

with centralized standards generally tend to perform no better (or worse) on international tests than those without. Tienken (2008) also points out there is no strong correlation between international test performance and countries with national standards. There is no evidence that the CCSS will be successful at the goals it has set out to achieve. Loveless (2012) explains that the CCSS are not the first national educational reform movement to be launched with such hope of success nor is it the first time policymakers have called on education standards to try to improve schools. Loveless (2012) discusses a study he previously conducted to try to estimate the probability that the CCSS would produce more learning.

The study started with the assumption that a good way to predict the future effects of any policy is to examine how well similar policies have worked in the past---in this case by examining the past effects of state education standards (Loveless, 2012, p.60).

Loveless (2012) describes his first investigation and determined that states with excellent state standards and states with poor state standards both made gains on the NAEP test. The second investigation examined the levels at which states set proficiency levels based on their standards and if this made a difference in achievement; states with low bars and high bars posted similar NAEP scores. The third investigation looked at the variation in achievement levels. "Striving to ensure that all students possess the knowledge and skills necessary for college or career means, statistically speaking, that a reduction in achievement variation should occur" (Loveless, 2012, p.60). Loveless (2012) goes on to explain that not much variation will occur: "Unless the CCSS possess some unknown power that previous standards didn't possess, that variation will go untouched" (p.60). Based on his study, Loveless (2012) concludes the most reasonable prediction is that the CCSS initiative will have little to no effect on student achievement.

Mathis (2010) discusses a few issues with the development of the CCSS, for example, the level of input from school-based practitioners appears to be minimal, the standards themselves have not been field tested, and it is unclear whether the tests used to measure the academic outcomes of CCSS will have sufficient validity to justify the changes they will bring. Mathis (2010) goes on to discuss that it seems improbable that the CCSS will have the positive effects on educational quality and equality being sought by supporters. Mathis (2010) recommends that the CCSS initiative should be continued, as an advisory tool for states and local districts for the purposes of improving existing curriculum and professional development. He suggests the CCSS should be subjected to extensive validation, trials, and subsequent revisions before implementation. Currently, there is no research to prove the CCSS will be successful. During this time, states should carefully examine and experiment with school evaluation systems.

Mathis (2010) describes how the federal government's role in K-12 education has historically been limited, with states charged in their individual constitutions with those responsibilities. Whether framed as a legal, political or policy matter, many people question whether the federal government should make such a strong demand on states to adopt a common set of standards. McGory (2014) discusses that some Tea Party groups and conservative parents disapprove of the federal government playing a role in the education benchmarks. This same group feels state governments and local school districts should be making these types of decisions about teaching and learning. This can be seen in Florida where the CCSS were supported and adopted and later revised because people felt the federal government should not control state and local education policy. McGory (2014) explains that when the CCSS were launched in 2010, there were a large number of supporters including lawmakers from both political parties, teachers unions, parent groups, and business associations. They made the

argument that national standards would raise achievement levels across the country. However specific groups quickly changed their stance on the initiative once the Obama administration started to heavily support the CCSS.

There are also a variety of implementation issues that may severely hinder the success of a common standards effort. Staff development and proper training for teachers, adequate funding, valid assessments attached to the standards, and the lack of evidence that better standards enhance student achievement are all concerns of the new reform initiative. Mathis (2010) stresses that standardization diminishes schooling at its best, it hinders the rich variety of experiences and higher-order thinking still found in many classrooms, and educators need to be cautious against locking children into a model of education created for one type of student. “Diversity is on the verge of extinction—diversity of curriculum, instructional practices, and assessment” (Brooks & Dietz, 2012, p. 65). Opponents are fearful that the CCSS will stifle the creativity among teachers and teachers will soon teach the same regardless of the student populations within their classrooms.

We are moving into an era that will link Common Core standards with a Common Core curriculum taught by teachers who will assess student learning through a slate of Common Core exams and be evaluated with a common rubric that uses scores on these exams as measures of teacher quality (Brooks & Dietz, 2012, p.65).

Brooks and Dietz (2012) go on to discuss that the standards themselves aren't the problem; many of the standards are aligned with the kind of constructivist teaching and learning observed in classrooms that are focused on critical thinking skills. The problem is that teachers may begin to teach to the assessments that will be attached to the CCSS.

One of the most prevalent and consistent findings is that high-stakes testing narrows the instructional curriculum and aligns it to the tests. This happens because, to varying degrees, teachers feel pressured to shape content norms to match that of the tests (Au, 2009, p.45).

This can be seen in previous reform movements where teachers feel they teach to standardized tests such as the FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test). Brooks and Deitz (2012) state that many districts are requiring teachers to use curriculum materials produced by the same companies that are producing the assessments, even predetermining the books students will use on the basis of the list of sample questions that illustrate the standard. “The initiative compartmentalizes thinking, privileges profit-making companies, narrows the creativity and professionalism of teachers, and limits meaningful student learning” (Brooks & Dietz, 2012, p. 65). Advocates state that the CCSS are robust and relevant to the real world, “In our view, robust and relevant learning is determined by what occurs in classrooms among teachers and students, not by standardized curriculum content mandated from above” (Brooks & Dietz, 2012, p. 65). Brooks and Dietz (2012) explain that good teaching practices include the following: classrooms that provide opportunities for students to construct integrated knowledge that can be used across disciplines and teachers who invite students to think about ideas that matter to them and who help students develop the skills to think about those ideas at higher levels. However, opponents of the CCSS feel the standards limit the opportunities to exhibit these types of best practices within the classroom. “Meaningful education reform is not something you can mandate, standardize, or easily measure” (Brooks & Dietz, 2012, p. 66) Brooks and Dietz (2012) explain that excellent teachers, as they always have, will continue to engage in the practices that the CCSS endorse: balancing informational and narrative texts, helping students build knowledge

within the disciplines, scaffolding complexity of text material, supporting students' abilities to offer evidence in defending an argument, and building academic vocabulary.

Ohler (2013) discusses that the new standards lack components that focus on creativity and technology. He goes on to explain that artistic skill should be accepted as a foundational literacy, schools should embrace and teach the grammar of new media as the new standards support grammar related to words, creativity and critical thinking need to be taught simultaneously, and teachers must provide opportunities for students to be innovative. Some opponents feel that the creativity of the student will be affected by the CCSS since they lack many components that require students to exhibit creativity. "If you search the ELA standards for the words creative, innovative, and original—and any associated terms, you will find scant mention of the words and the idea they represent" (Ohler, 2013, p.42). Ohler (2013) states the CCSS are clear, detailed, and represent common literacy standards, however, they limit literacy to just words and numbers, excluding new types of media that focus on students' creative side. "Literacy has always meant being able to read and write the media forms of the day, thus, it isn't enough to simply consume the media collage; we must be able to create it as well" (Ohler, 2013, p. 44).

Finally, opponents are fearful that failure to provide adequate professional development will leave teachers unprepared to effectively implement the CCSS. "And added to those factors are concerns that the standards are pitched at a level that may require teachers themselves to function on a higher cognitive plane" (Sawchuk, 2012, p.4). As stated earlier, to assure that all students are receiving the same, high level of education, the standards are much more literacy based and complex than many of the current states' standards teachers are using. Calkins et al., (2012) discuss that one concern will be that many teachers never received any training or

practice with these skills in their education. School leaders will need to arrange ways to share strategies and methods across classrooms so that students can carry these literacy skills across disciplines. Sawchuk (2012) also states that if the CCSS are prompting higher order thinking skills required of all students, than teachers will also need to increase their knowledge on content as well as how to teach these new standards. “Pedagogical challenges lurk, too, because teachers need updated skills to teach in ways that emphasize the standards' focus on problem-solving, according to professional-development scholars” (Sawchuk, 2012, p.5). Professional development and teacher education is going to be a key component for the successful implementation of the CCSS. Any set of standards will be useless if teachers do not understand them and are not adequately trained on how to effectively teach them. Larson (2012) stresses the importance of professional development opportunities and professional learning communities if teachers are going to be able to adapt to the CCSS and effectively improve their instruction to meet the imperatives of the CCSS. Hermeling (2013) discusses the importance of professional development and much more cross-departmental collaboration to see that a common approach to these skills is utilized. Language Arts teachers and Social Studies should be given time to discuss the ELA Standards how they can be implemented across content areas.

Loveless (2012) states that advocates are counting on two mechanisms to overcome the obstacles that lie ahead: high-quality professional development and improvements in curriculum. He goes on to state that educators will be promised professional development tied to the CCSS but this may not be the case. “Educators will be bombarded with tales of wonderful professional development tied to Common Core Standards, be on guard” (Loveless, 2012, p.61). Sawchuk (2012) also states that if districts do not offer proper staff development for their teachers this reform movement, like many in the past, will not succeed. He goes on to discuss that it is going

to be quite challenging to get the 3.2 million educators within the 45 states that adopted the standards prepared for the changes that are set forth with the CCSS.

The most reasonable prediction is that the Common Core initiative will have little to no effect on student achievement, moreover on the basis of current research, high-quality professional development and ‘excellent’ curricular materials are also unlikely to boost the Common Core standards’ slim chances of success (Loveless, 2012, p.63).

Lee and Swan (2013) discuss that the CCSS present a unique challenge to social studies educators: “They put social studies teachers in the position of possibly having to adjust their practice to meet new demands for literacy instruction, and thus raise many difficult questions” (Lee & Swan, 2013, p.327). Lee and Swan (2013) discuss that questions such as the following may arise: how can we fit the new CCSS into already packed social studies curriculum and what types of staff development will be available to teachers for support?

The Common Core State Standards and Social Studies Instruction

The CCSS initiative is in response to inconsistencies among the current state standards. The main goal of the CCSS is to assure that all students will be college and/or career ready by the time they graduate from high school. Through consistency among and within states the CCSS initiative is hoping to provide the same high quality of education to all students around the nation. As previously discussed, the CCSS are very different from the current NGSSS and other state content standards that teachers are required to implement in their classrooms. “One glance at the Common Core’s expectations reveals that today’s document places a much stronger emphasis on higher-level comprehension skills” (Calkins et al. 2012, p.9). The success and/or failures of the CCSS are still to be established due to how new the standards are and due to the

fact that data to determine the validity of the standards is not yet available. What is known from the research thus far is that change is inevitable due to the CCSS. If teachers will be expected to fully implement the CCSS by the 2014-2015 school year anticipated, changes are in the near future for all K-12 schools in the 45 states that have already adopted the standards. Advocates feel that the CCSS should be used to support cultures within schools that put teacher professionalism and student learning at the center. The standards themselves can enhance professional conversations about teaching and learning to create more equal learning environments for all students and ultimately raise achievement levels. “The goal of standards-based reforms like the widespread adoption of CCSS is to increase student achievement through the specification of academic content standards and assessments” (Troia & Olinghouse, 2013, p. 345). Tomlinson (2012) states that CCSS are ingredients for a good curriculum, but they are not a recipe: “... better ingredients than many we’ve had in the past, they are the contemporary building codes—better suited to the 21st century than many previous sets of building codes, but they’re not the buildings” (Tomlinson, 2013, p.91). These “better ingredients” that 45 states have adopted are surely to bring change within the current educational recipe.

Pre-service and practicing teachers in Florida will need to be prepared for the expected changes within the CCSS. Since the CCSS are very different from the NGSSS, the CCSS being very literacy- and skill-based and the NGSSS being very content-based (see Appendix A), staff development and teacher training will need to take place for a complete understanding of the standards. Ginn (2010) states that teacher education programs will need to adapt to teach the new standards, professional development for current teachers will have to take place, new curricula must be written and new textbooks adopted, as well as new assessments developed to measure how well students are learning. King (2011) states that for the CCSS to be successful, higher

education leaders and faculty must define college readiness and align key policies for the school-to-college transition. Alberti (2012) discusses that one of the most important factors within the initiative processes of the CCSS will be to make sure teachers understand the changes that the standards will bring. Alberti (2012) goes on to discuss that educators need to focus on a few shifts that have the most significant effect on students. For teachers to be able to understand the new standards they must be given ample staff development training where the standards will be unpacked or broken down. “Prioritizing time within the school day to support students’ successful attainment of CCSS will be a crucial test of school leadership and vision” (Larson, 2012, p.112). Brooks and Dietz (2012) discuss that professional development is going to be key, leadership teams must establish structures for professional learning that foster progress toward more effective teaching practices that emerge from understandings of learning processes. McTighe and Wiggins (2013) suggest that the first step in translating the CCSS into engaging and outcome-focused curriculum involves a careful reading of the documents in order to ensure clarity about the end results and an understanding of how the pieces fit together. “These shifts should guide all aspects of implementing the standards--- including professional development, assessment design, and curriculum” (Alberti, 2012, p.25).

Providing social studies educators with adequate professional development is going to be a vital component for the understanding and effective implementations of the CCSS, since they differ from the NGSSS. Fullan (2007) discusses three key factors in order for real change to occur in schools, educators must: have motivation that the change can occur, understanding the meaning of the proposed change, feel that they themselves play a role in the change, and experience some success with the change. Further stating, that individual teachers must experience some part of the proposed change before they can fully understanding the change.

Fullan (2007) stresses the importance of professional learning communities as a means for providing teachers with needed support as they implement changes in practice. Fullan (2008) discusses that professional learning communities should be a place where teachers can learn from one another and its focus in instructional improvement is critical. Further stating, characteristics of professional communities include: focus of instruction, using student data as a means of improvement, teachers collaborating with one another through planning, and have school leadership that helps create and sustain the conditions to do all of this. Lastly, Fullan (2008) states that the collaboration process needs to happen within the district and state level as well.

There have been studies conducted that concentrate on the Math and ELA CCSS compared to state standards. Porter et al. (2011) conducted a study focusing on the differences and similarities between state content standards and the CCSS, finding considerable amounts of variations among the two. Porter et al's (2011) study found the CCSS for math emphasize the cognitive demand category "demonstrate understanding" more than state standards do and that the CCSS place slightly less emphasis than state standards do on "memorize" and "perform procedures." Both sets of standards place a similar emphasis on "conjecture." Although there is relatively little emphasis on "solve non-routine problems" in either set of standards, the CCSS have twice the emphasis that state standards do. "The Common Core standards put much greater emphasis on "analyze," at roughly a third of the content, than do states, at less than 20% of the content. The states put greater emphasis on "perform procedures" and "generate" than do the CCSS. Thus, for ELA, the CCSS would shift the content even more strongly than they would for mathematics toward higher levels of cognitive demand" (Porter et al., 2011, p.106). This study

shows that the CCSS demands a higher level of cognitive thinking of students when compared to state standards.

Since there is a shift in the level of standards, there will most likely be a shift in the way a teacher presents the content and teaches the skill. “Implementing the standards will mean clear shifts in instructional practice, away from rote activities that involve seeking, writing, and memorization of factual content and toward those that require higher levels of cognitive demand” (Gullen & Zimmerman, 2013, p. 64). The ELA Standards make this point in their characterization of the capacities of the independent student:

Students can, without significant scaffolding, comprehend and evaluate complex texts across a range of types and disciplines, and they can construct effective arguments and convey intricate or multifaceted information...

Students adapt their communication in relation to audience, task, purpose, and discipline.

Likewise, students are able independently to discern a speaker’s key

points, request clarification, and ask relevant questions... Without prompting,

they demonstrate command of standard English and acquire and use a wide ranging

vocabulary. More broadly, they become self-directed learners, effectively seeking out and

using resources to assist them, including teachers, peers, and print and digital reference

materials (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief

State School Officers, 2010, p.7).

Many of the skills mentioned in the previous statement should be best practices seen already throughout all content areas, however the current NGSSS that are required of social studies teachers do not reflect such a robust and rigorous statement.

A change in standards prompts a change in what is being taught and how it is being taught. Marzano (2013a) discusses 41 aspects of instruction within the *Art and Science of Teaching* that he feels should be incorporated into lessons. These elements can also be used to implement the instructional shifts implicit in the CCSS. Marzano (2013a) goes on to discuss that in the service of the CCSS, seven of the 41 elements in the model should become staples of instruction, and the following should be incorporated in one's instruction: identifying critical information, helping students elaborate new information, helping students record and present knowledge, helping students examine similarities and differences, helping students examine errors in reasoning, helping students revise knowledge, and engaging students in cognitively complex tasks involving hypothesis generation and testing. In 2013, an interview was conducted with Marzano regarding the CCSS. Within the interview, Marzano (2013a), discussed how the Common Core was designed from a host of things, one of them being research on how students learn best, that is, student learning that progresses from the simple to the complex. As such, Marzano argues, these standards have the potential to help deepen student learning if instructional practices are aligned. He goes on to suggest that it's important to have an instructional model, backed by research into best practices, that provides a framework for teaching CCSS.

Marzano et al., (2013) discuss two broad categories of instructional skills that teachers will need to focus on when approaching the CCSS: Cognitive skills, defined as those skills needed to effectively process information and complete tasks, and conative skills, that are defined as the skills needed to allow a person to examine his or her knowledge and emotions in order to choose an appropriate course of action. Marzano and Heflebower (2012) identified three specific cognitive strategies that teachers can use to address cognitive skills, such as; generating

conclusions, identifying common and logical errors, and presenting and supporting claims. Marzano and Heflebower (2012) also identified three specific cognitive strategies that teachers can use to address conative skills, such as, being aware of the power of interpretations, taking multiple perspectives, interacting with responsibility, and handling controversy and conflict resolution. As a practicing teacher there are instructional strategies that can be used to achieve these outcomes and personally I feel that some of these outcomes are easier for teachers to achieve than others. For example, the *History Alive!* Program published by the Teachers Curriculum Institute (2002) has a lesson on the Westward Movement where students analyze the multiple perspectives of the different groups that traveled to the west. Then, by making comparisons that examine push and pull factors from past to present, students explore present day migration movements. Another example of an instructional strategy that can be used to teach students the power of interpretations and taking multiple perspectives could be to have students analyze the Declaration of Independence. Students could interpret the documents from the point of view of a male white slave owner, a female black slave, and a free male and/or female white and/or black person from the North. Each person is going to not only interpret the document differently, but each person will also have a different perspective on the meaning of the document. This is under the assumption that teachers will be given ample staff development and training to be able to understand and apply the standards in their own classrooms.

The CCSS will bring about changes within the current reading standards and the reading strategies that will need to be used to achieve the level of rigor within the standards. The CCSS includes two categories of standards. The first is a list of College and Career Readiness (CCR) standards in each of four strands (reading, writing, listening and speaking, and language).

These CCR standards are broad statements about what students should know and

be able to do in each strand by the time they graduate from high school. The second category includes grade-appropriate learning expectations for each grade, K-12. These expectations are designed to provide “additional specificity” by translating the CCR standards into detailed, grade-specific learning objectives (Carmichael, Martino, Porter-Magee, & Wilson, 2010, p.22).

Lamb and Johnson (2013) state that after years of focusing on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), the social studies are reflected with the new CCSS.

The CCSS under the Grades 6-12 Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technology, provide literacy-based standards that apply to social studies. Among these are literacy standards focusing on reading and writing skills. Many of the literacy skills focused within the CCSS for social studies focus on the use of primary and secondary sources. “Rather than simply reading historical documents, involve youth in deep-thinking activities such as making comparisons among different perspectives, using passages as evidence to support arguments, and drawing conclusions based on multiple sources” (Lamb & Johnson, 2013, p.62). Practicing social studies teachers, including myself already use primary and secondary sources to enhance lessons in some form or fashion. During the 2013-2014 school year, within our Professional Learning Communities (PLC) at the school where I teach, one of the main aspects we focused on is how we can successfully incorporate the CCSS into our curriculum and instructional strategies. One major way we do this is to incorporate primary and secondary sources within our instructional strategies. We have students analyze documents to get a better understanding of what was taking place during a specific time period. We also have students analyze various documents to find evidence that supports a specific point of view. Teachers are using primary and secondary

sources within their classrooms. Are they utilizing the primary and secondary sources at a level that is expected of the CCSS?

Beach et al. (2012) states that a primary focus of the CCSS is developing the ability to read informational texts employed in social studies classes by applying social studies analysis. The CCSS heavily focus on being able to analyze texts, non-fiction and informational pieces. “In reading literary texts or original documents from a social studies perspective, students need to recognize how these texts are informed by beliefs and values of the cultural and historical periods in which they were produced” (Beach et al., 2012, p.105). Beach et al. (2012) suggest many reading strategies that social studies teacher can use to effectively achieve the CCSS: “front loading” (a strategy used to pre- teach information, preparing students for what is to come) texts based on topics, themes, or issues, having students take written notes, blogging, completing discussion questions through journal writing, think alouds, and paired reading should be used and students should also pose questions to formulate arguments and critique issues. As a practicing teacher, I know that teachers, including myself, use some of these strategies in our classroom and, again, the question is: to what extent are teachers using them? Are they being used in an effective manner so that students will be able to meet these outcomes?

“Meeting the CCSS entails analyzing writers’ explanations for historical events as well as considering how different writers may provide different explanations for the same events and adopt different perspectives” (Beach et. al., 2012, p.127). “The CCSS writing standards for social studies and science focus on the importance of engaging in inquiry-based, constructivist social studies and science instruction” (Beach et al., 2012, p.170). Beach et al. (2012) goes on to explain that because high school students have difficulty synthesizing complex informational texts in different subject areas the CCSS includes standards on reading complex texts in social

studies and science not found in most state standards. They also point out that the CCSS focus on argumentative writing versus the expository writing on which many state standards focus. Davis (2012) states that argument writing consists of thesis/claim, evidence, and appeals to logic and reason. Further, stating that persuasion writing appeals to the emotions of the audience.

The rigor, complexity, and higher order literacy skills presented in the CCSS are at a much higher level than the current NGSSS. “In later grades, history, social studies, and science teachers will equip students with the skills needed to read and gain information from content-specific non-fiction texts” (Alberti, 2012, p.25). Teachers will need to expose students to a plethora of reading material as well as non-fiction texts and teach them how to detect credibility and bias within the text.

In middle and high school, nonfiction texts are a powerful vehicle for learning content as students build skills in the careful reading of a variety of texts, such as primary documents in a social studies class or descriptions of scientific observations in a science class (Alberti, 2012, p.25).

Many reading strategies are provided to help teachers understand the rigor among the CCSS. These strategies may also assist teachers across all content areas and better prepare them to effectively meet the goals of many of the CCSS. “More powerful than a room full of gadgets is a teacher who has a deep appreciation of what the new forms of reading and writing entail” (Kist, 2013, p.43). So once again, teachers need to first understand the CCSS before they can begin to choose instructional strategies that will work best. Rothman (2012a) explains that standards call for some major changes in classroom practice to enable students to meet higher expectations, such as the greater level of text complexity in reading and challenging math expectations for all. He goes on to discuss that many teachers are not prepared for these shifts

stating that teacher preparation institutions must embrace the standards to ensure that those entering the profession are ready to teach what students are expected to learn. Rothman (2012b) states that the shift among the ELA Standards will increase the need for students to read more non-fictional texts, focus more on evidence from the texts by reading things more closely, often times re-reading the text, and increase the level of text complexity in what students will be expected to read. Davis (2012), states to address the CCSS, besides making sure that an individual text is challenging enough, teachers can raise the level of content in their classrooms by using multiple sources of information which will also assist in students seeing a variety of perspectives and help students adjust to texts at varying levels of difficulty.

A strategy that is constantly discussed throughout the literature is the strategy known as close reading, “the ability to read texts closely---to be text detectives” (Kist, 2013, p.39). “Essentially, close reading means reading to uncover layers of meaning that lead to deep comprehension” (Boyles, 2012, p.37). Boyles (2012) explains that students still need to read longer text, but that teachers should not abandon shorts texts. It should be recognized that studying short texts is helpful because it allows students with a wide range of reading levels to practice close reading. “Teachers and students will experience how powerful literacy can be when texts are not only used to teach basic skills, but also viewed as a source of knowledge” (Hiebert & Pearson, 2012, p.49). The standards also expect students to be able to demonstrate that they can speak and listen effectively; these are fairly new standards that are often not included in state standards. Rothman (2012b) states that teachers should ask students to engage in small-group and whole-class discussions and evaluate them on how well they understand the speakers’ points. “Reading lessons will need to shift away from an emphasis on pre-reading to greater attention to re-reading and follow-up” (Shanahan, 2013, p.15). Shanahan (2013) states

reading will involve more critical analysis and synthesis of information from multiple texts which will require better and more appropriate professional development, instructional materials, and supervision. Alberti (2012) discusses that the standards focus on text complexity because the ability to comprehend complex texts is the most significant factor differentiating college- ready from non-college- ready readers.

Another strategy discussed in the literature that can promote higher order thinking literacy skills is known as Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS). Housen (2002) discusses that VTS employs selected strategies and sequenced art images that develop students' abilities to pay close attention to detail, think critically, and reason with evidence as they articulate personal interpretations and build upon the ideas of others. This is a strategy that can be used in social studies classrooms and is very similar to the strategies used when analyzing primary and secondary documents, written text and visuals. Housen (2002) discusses that VTS discussions are facilitated, not directly led, by teachers. The role of the teacher is to motivate student investigations with three questions: What's going on in the picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can we find? Through the VTS process students are using higher order thinking skills such as justifying their reasoning for responses, by providing evidence from the image. "By engaging students dialogically in investigations of complex and compelling visual texts, we have observed strong investigative initiative and the genuine desire to learn" (Franco & Dunrath, 2012, p. 30). VTS are also useful in helping students to understand diverse perspectives through engaging in collaborative discussions with peers.

Writing strategies are also provided to assist teachers in choosing specific types of instructional strategies that would be useful when implementing the CCSS. "The CCSS emphasize using evidence from texts to present careful analyses, well-defended claims, and clear

information” (Alberti, 2012, p.25). Alberti (2012) explains that narrative writing will be required throughout the grade levels, as it enables students to develop skills that are essential to the argumentative informative writing that is emphasized in later grades.

The standards focus on evidence-based writing and speaking to inform and persuade is a significant shift from current typical practice today the most common forms of writing in K-12 draw from student experience and opinion, which alone will not prepare students for the demands of college and career (Alberti, 2012, p.25).

The CCSS place a great deal of emphasis on written expression and encourages an increased focus on writing in the classroom.

Out of 36 evidence-based writing instruction and assessment practices, the CCSS signal less than half of these in any given grade, suggesting that practitioners will need to consult other resources to acquire knowledge about such practices and how to exploit them to facilitate students' attainment of the standards (Troia & Olinghouse, 2013, p. 343).

Calkins et al. (2012) recommend that teachers implement the following strategies to assist in the upcoming changes due to the CCSS in writing. First, teachers need to incorporate informational writing across the curriculum. Secondly, teachers should teach the writing process that draws from research to raise achievement levels. Thirdly, teachers need carefully observe when a student's writing is improving or not and provide constructive feedback. Fourthly, they suggest that teachers should be aligning instruction across grade levels so no gaps can be found. Finally, they suggest, when working with informational writing, it is not only important to plan instruction across grade levels but it is also important to plan across disciplines as well. Once

again, teachers will need training, resources, and time available to them that will assist in the changes of the new writing CCSS.

As Kist (2013) states, many teachers are preparing their students to navigate new types of reading and writing based in the ELA CCSS. Four strategies are discussed: give students practice reading screen-based texts, practice in digital writing, practice in collaborative writing, and practice working with informational texts. For example, the first strategy that Kist (2013) discusses gives students practice reading screen-based texts and is closely related to the strategy of close reading. “As students enter a world in which they will do much of their reading and writing on screen, it makes sense to start by looking at non-print texts, such as in the genres of video, music, and visual art” (Kist, 2013, p. 39). This strategy gives students the opportunity to examine things closely from more than one perspective and when students closely look at one element of the particular screen-based text they are able to determine more details associated with that perspective. “Although technology-infused lessons can be used to explore complex information, one of the most compelling reasons for integrating technology is that it helps students acquire factual content in less time” (Gullen & Zimmerman, 2013, p.64). Teachers usually use technology to enhance a lesson they are teaching. However some pitfalls of using technology may be access to computers at school and not all students have an electronic device of their own. This could present a challenge when trying to use technology as often as we would like to support a teacher’s needs due to the CCSS.

Instructional Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping is defined as, “Encompassing the decisions teachers make about curriculum and instruction and the criteria used to make those decisions” (Thornton, 2005, p.1). Teachers are the ultimate decision makers of what curriculum will be taught and how it will be taught. There

are many factors that teachers consider when deciding what instructional practices they will choose to use in their classroom. Teachers examine the curriculum, state standards, and the reading and writing levels of the students in their classes. Teachers have to think about the specific types of children in their class, ESOL and ESE included, and teachers will get to know their students and figure out how they learn best. Teachers also have to think about high-stakes standardized tests that students have to take. Teachers have a plethora of things to consider when deciding what instructional practices they will ultimately use. Thornton (1989) states that the criteria the teacher brings into play to determine uses of curriculum and instructional strategies are a product of his or her frame of reference. Shaver (1979) discusses that a teacher's belief about schooling, his or her knowledge of subject area and of available materials and techniques, also affects the daily experiences in their classrooms. Grant (2007) discusses two organizational influences that can influence a teacher's decision-making. First are the groups of people teachers interact with in their school and district settings.

The second set of organizational influences highlights the contexts in which teachers work; that is, the norms, structures, and resources that define their teaching situations. The people teachers work with—students, colleagues, administrators, parents—and the cultural conditions in which they work can exert influence on teachers' work in multiple, if not necessarily, predictable ways (Grant, 2007, p.252).

There are already so many factors that play a part in the instructional decision making process for teachers and the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) may have a similar effect. Understanding how the CCSS might affect the instructional gatekeeping role of a teacher can be very valuable to social studies education. Overall, there is limited research about the CCSS since

the initiative is so new within education. Included in the limited amount of research is how the implementation of the CCSS might affect the instructional decision-making of middle school social studies teachers. Porter, Fusarelli, and Fusarelli (2015) state that school change depends heavily on what goes on at the classroom level. Further, teachers are the ultimately enactors of any change effort. Will the CCSS become another factor when teachers are deciding what strategies will work best with their students? There are innumerable instructional strategies that teachers can use at any given time but it is up to the teacher to decide when an appropriate strategy will work best for each boy and girl in their class. Thornton (2005) states that educators may tend the gate consciously or unconsciously, but their gatekeeping is inevitable. This is why it is crucial that teachers understand the goals of the CCSS and how they will achieve those goals. As previously stated, the CCSS are different from the NGSSS, so teachers must be aware of these differences since they may influence their instructional strategy decision-making process. It is vital for teachers to be cognizant of the following:

With the NCSS Themes, the NGSSS, and the CCSS, there presents a challenge of how to teach all the content and skills mandated by each professional body. As discussed, the CCSS are expected to bring curricular and instructional changes to the classroom. These changes are expected, but to what extent change in the classroom will occur is the question. Beach and colleagues (2012) instruct teachers about their new roles thusly:

In planning classroom activities based on addressing certain standards, you'll be translating those standards into curriculum and instruction related to your specific classroom context, you'll need to identify specific activities that will best serve to implement a standard by unpacking the verbs in a standard to identify those tasks students will perform and the purpose/value for employing those tasks (p. 75).

Teachers already do this with the existing standards, however, the CCSS are heavily focused on literacy skills, specifically reading and writing, which is a change from the NGSSS. Beach et al., (2012) also advice teachers:

How you implement the CCSS will depend on the instructional approach you adopt, in teaching students in the 21st century, we believe that it is important that you go beyond traditional approaches to teaching, we know that students are most likely to be engaged when they have the responsibility to frame events, construct identities, collaborate with others, synthesize and create texts (p.viii).

All of the strategies listed are best practices within social studies education which all lead to higher order thinking skills. But to what degree are teachers currently using these strategies or a better question do they know how to employ such strategies? This is a question that will be determined once teachers start implementing the CCSS. How much ownership will teachers have when choosing instructional strategies that will be most effective when implementing the CCSS if they do not fully understand how to teach such skills? This is another question that will be answered once teachers are required to put into effect the CCSS. “For any curriculum and instruction to be successful, it is essential that you have a sense of ownership over how it is implemented in your classroom” (Beach et al., 2012, p. 71). Opponents fear that the CCSS might stifle a teacher’s creativity when choosing instructional strategies to use. They also fear that the CCSS will prompt companies to create cookie-cutter curriculums and provide pre-made instructional strategies for teachers to use.

All of these things could affect a teacher’s role as an instructional gatekeeper. “When you have opportunities to modify and supplement your curriculum and design your own instruction, you are able to respond more authentically to your students” (Beach et al., 2012,

p.72). This is another fear of opponents, that the CCSS will create less equality within the classroom because teachers will not be able to meet the individual needs of each student. “Although many efforts have been made to bolster the well-being of students (e.g., free and reduced-price meal programs, reductions in class size, data-based decision-making and accountability), teaching practices are perhaps what matters most in helping students become well-adjusted individuals within the classroom” (Troia & Olinghouse, 2013, p. 344).

Advocates of the CCSS state that the standards leave plenty of room for teacher creativity and teacher decision-making in the types of instructional strategies being used since the standards tell them not how to teach, but rather what they need to teach and what students need to learn. “Supporters of the new standards will likely note that creativity relates more to instructional methodology than to literacy and that the Common Core initiative leaves choices about methodology to teacher practitioners” (Ohler, 2013, p.42). Advocates also state that the CCSS lends itself to the use of technology in the classroom and teachers need to infuse more technology within their instructional strategies. “Teachers must explicitly teach how to innovate, particularly in relation to technology” (Ohler, 2013, p.45). Ohler (2013) discusses the importance of teaching students to think critically as well as creatively to be ready for today’s digital society.

The Art and Science of Teaching (Marzano, 2007) is a research-based framework designed to enhance the pedagogical skills of teachers through self-reflection and coaching. Marzano (2013b) explains that this framework can also be used to implement the pedagogical shifts implicit in the CCSS: explicit connections between instructional strategies in *The Art and Science of Teaching* and the CCSS are described in a number of his works. The county where my study took place is currently using Marzano’s framework to guide teachers through the CCSS.

The county also bases their teacher evaluation system off of Marzano's framework. All of the teachers at the school where this research took place have been given a copy of Marzano's *The Art and Science of Teaching* to use as a guide through the CCSS. As a practicing teacher in a county and school that uses Marzano's framework, I can see its effects on my own instructional gatekeeping role as a teacher. I have used the book as a reference many times when choosing particular strategies for particular skills. For example, I have used previewing strategies and summarizing strategies from the book. Knowing that my evaluation is based off of Marzano's framework I am very conscious to make sure to incorporate Marzano teaching strategies into my daily instruction.

Along with teacher evaluation systems, like the one in my county that is tied to a specific framework, teachers also have to be aware of state standardized assessments. Rothman (2012c) discusses that the U.S Department of Education has spent hundreds of millions of dollars to create assessments that will be aligned with the CCSS such as the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). PARCC is also assisting states and districts in the implementation of the standards. The Florida Department of Education has other plans for Florida's standardized tests. As of the 2014-2015 school year, students within the state of Florida are required to take the Florida Standards Assessments which measures student success in the Florida Standards (revised CCSS) and certain middle and high school subjects are required to also take Florida End of the Year Course (EOC) Assessments. In middle school, seventh grade Civic students are required to take an EOC assessment that measures student success in the social studies Florida Standards (CCSS "layered" above the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards). Teachers across all grade levels and content areas will be responsible for preparing students to be successful in the Florida Standards Assessments and certain social studies, such as

Civics will be responsible for preparing students for EOC assessments. There is mixed research regarding how much standardized assessments affect the instructional gatekeeping role of a teacher.

Proponents and critics of testing alike typically assume that tests drive the entirety of teaching. The research evidence suggests otherwise. Although a number of questions remain open, the emerging research base suggests that state tests influence teachers' content, instructional, and assessment decisions differently" (Grant, 2007, p.250).

From personal experience within my Professional Learning Community (PLC) during the 2013-2014 school year we examined the specific standards and types of questions that are on the standardized assessments and decide the specific curriculum and instructional strategies to use based on that examination. The county in which I work in provides many resources to assist in this preparation such as Civics EOC study guides and sample exams. Our PLC examines the CCSS and the NGSSS to make sure we are covering and teaching the content and skills that students will need to know to successfully pass the Florida Standards Assessment as well as the Civics EOC. This can be seen when we are deciding what standard to teach and when we plan to teach the standard. Some teachers feel as though they are cramming information down their student's throats but others continue to teach in ways they feel are most effective. Some teachers feel forced to teach to the test and give over control of their instructional strategies.

The principal pedagogical effect of state social studies tests appears to be on teachers' content decisions. Teachers report making a range of small to large changes in the subject matter ideas they teach. State tests do not tell teachers how to teach, but they do suggest what should be taught. That teachers modify their curriculum in reaction to standardized exams, then, makes sense given that state curriculum and assessment policies focus on

content. (Grant, 2007, p.251).

The following statement is true for the social studies EOC assessments however many of the items on the Civics EOC require students to analyze and perform other higher order thinking tasks. Not only are teachers teaching specific content but they are also teaching specific skills. While social studies educators prepare students for the Florida Standards Assessment, they are teaching higher order thinking skills through the specific content. For example, a teacher can have a student analyze the Declaration of Independence, with a series of higher order thinking questions, to explore the meaning of the document. Vogler and Virtue (2007) state that teachers need to trust their professional training and pedagogical knowledge to guide their instruction decisions, “otherwise, the study of social studies will become nothing more than the ability to regurgitate a collection of facts listed in a state-mandated curriculum framework” (p.57).

As stated, many factors influence a social studies teacher’s role as an instructional gatekeeper. Will the CCSS be another factor that affects this role? Hopefully, teachers will be provided with ample staff development and support so they can understand the standards and learn effective ways to implement the strategies within their classrooms.

Ross (2006) states the most effective means of improving curriculum is to improve the professional development given to teachers, and that teachers need to be better prepared to exercise their curricular decision making responsibilities that are a crucial part of instructional practice. Also, the hope is that teachers can find a balance between using the curricular and instructional supplements provided to them and still be able to make informed, creative, and innovative decisions on the types of instructional strategies that should be used with the specific population of students in their classes.

Instead of focusing on the Common Core initiative all by itself, we’re seeing teachers use

their own language to adapt a research-based, 21st century framework and use that framework to examine their content and student work and to inform how they shape curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Sawch, Villanueva, & Choo, 2013, p.95).

Calkins et al. (2012) suggest that overall, teachers need to provide clear goals and effective feedback to their students, they need to provide plenty of opportunity for students to read in school, and they must ensure their instructional practices are constantly moving their students forward by aligning teaching strategies and content. Calkins et al. (2012) furthermore suggest that teachers need to take advantage of a school's existing efforts to achieve high learning levels. Teachers need to devise a plan to alter existing curriculum to meet the needs of the higher levels of literacy skills that will need to be taught and finally teachers need to see themselves as facilitators, and hand over more responsibility to students. "What teachers believe and their resultant decisions concerning planning, instructional strategy, assessment of student learning, and so forth are the "key" determinants of what students take away from the classroom" (Thornton, 1994, p.5).

Gaps in the Common Core State Standards Literature

There is a clear lack in the research available on the CCSS since it is a new initiative within the American education system. I feel that now that the CCSS are fully implemented more research and data will be available on the viability of the standards, if indeed the standards raise overall achievement levels, if the standards are fully preparing all students for college and career endeavors, if teachers were and are provided with adequate staff development, and if teachers' instructional and daily practices are being affected positively or negatively by the initiative. Advocates and opponents of the CCSS are basing their predictions on previous data available on the success and failures of standard-based reform movements of the past. Based on a survey of

officials from 37 states that have adopted the CCSS, the Center on Education Policy (2012) found all that were surveyed have developed plans to fully implement the standards by this current school year. In addition, the 37 states plan to adopt or revise assessments and to revise curriculum materials aligned with the CCSS. They also plan to develop and disseminate materials for professional development and conduct state-wide professional development activities. Rothman (2012c) discusses how since state efforts are underway, national organizations and companies are developing materials and preparing educators to revamp instruction and supervision around the new standards. “The fact that the standards have been adopted by so many states opens the door for cross-state partnerships that could not have been taken place when each state developed its own standards” (Rothman, 2012c p.20). Change is on the horizon once again within the American education system. Due to the CCSS, new curriculums across all content areas and new state assessments will be created. As a new reform is set in motion, educators can await the challenges and successes that all reform movements within education will bring. As a social studies educator the CCSS is expected to have an effect on the way we approach the curriculum and instructional practices we choose to use; to what extent will be the question.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how the implementation of the recently adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS) might affect the instructional decision-making of middle school social studies teachers and to what extent the CCSS might affect a middle school social studies teacher's instructional gatekeeping role. Due to the changes brought forth by the CCSS, teachers are expected to have to shift the way they approach and implement the current Florida Standards. The instructional strategies social studies teachers use in their classrooms should reflect the CCSS changes given that: "The CCSS require more clarity in the progressions of knowledge being addressed in class, more application of knowledge by students along with more and deeper inferential thinking, and the creation of sound evidence for conclusions and claims" (Marzano, 2013a, p. 3). The purpose of this study was also to examine any possible successes and/or challenges social studies teachers face when implementing the CCSS.

Since the CCSS initiative is fairly new within social studies, there is a lack of research available on what types of instructional strategies middle school social studies teachers are using to achieve the CCSS. My study explored new areas of research to give insight on how the implementation of the CCSS might affect the instructional decision-making of middle school social studies teachers. My research can potentially provide valuable information to college of education teacher preparation programs, district staff development departments, and social studies educators around the United States.

Research Questions

- 1) To what extent does the CCSS influence the middle school social studies teachers' decision-making in the types of instructional strategies they choose to use in their classrooms?
- 2) What specific types of instructional strategies do middle school social studies teachers report to use when implementing the CCSS?
- 3) To what extent do middle school social studies teachers feel adequately prepared to make decisions regarding the types of instructional strategies they choose to use to implement the CCSS in their classrooms?
- 4) What instructional successes do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS into their classrooms?
- 5) What instructional challenges do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS into their classrooms?

Answering these questions can benefit practicing social studies teachers within the United States by providing examples of how the implementation of CCSS might affect the types of instructional decision-making. Answering these questions may assist in professional development efforts in the United States and will also inform social studies teacher education programs at the college level regarding the CCSS by examining the shift in curricular and instructional practice.

Qualitative and Case Study Methodology

I conducted a qualitative case study. Qualitative approaches can increase the level of understanding of the inside world of students, teachers, administrators, parents, and others involved in education. As Berg and Lune (2012) describes, qualitative techniques allow researchers to share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives. Yin (2011) describes five distinct features of qualitative research: studying the meaning of people's lives, representing the perspectives and points of view of the people within the study, covering the contextual conditions of people's lives, contributing to concepts that give insights and help explain social behavior, and using multiple sources of evidence rather than relying on a single source.

I focused on middle school social studies teachers. Exploring not only how the CCSS might affect their instructional decision-making but also to understand to what extent the CCSS might affect the types of instructional they chose to use in their classrooms. And finally uncovering any successes and/or challenges social studies teachers experienced when implementing the CCSS.

According to Yin (2003), a case study design should be considered when: (a) the focus of the study is to answer "how" and "why" questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved; and/or (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study. Within this research study I examined four things: I identified how the implementation of the CCSS affects the instructional decision-making of middle school social studies teachers, I determined if the types of instructional strategies they chose to use in their classroom are influenced by the CCSS, and I sought to understand any successes and/or challenges they experienced when implementing the CCSS. I did not

manipulate any behavior involved and I believe contextual conditions such as the implementation of the CCSS is relevant to the instructional strategies social studies teachers employ in their classrooms. Stake (1995) discusses two types of case studies, intrinsic and instrumental. Stake (1995) defines an intrinsic case study as something in which we have intrinsic interest. I conducted an intrinsic case study because I had a particular interest in this case. As a practicing social studies teacher in a state where the CCSS is becoming part of our daily lives, I had great interest in the effects that the CCSS have on the decisions teachers make and types of instructional strategies being used. I also teach in a district that is promoting the infusion of the CCSS as well as work in a school that provided support for the CCSS. As a practicing social studies teacher, I can see firsthand the effects of the CCSS at work. Stake (1995) defines an instrumental case study as a study on something that we are seeking to generally understand better and from which we can gain insight. I also conducted an instrumental case study because I was trying to understand the case under study as well. Again, as a social studies middle school teacher, I wanted to understand how middle school social studies teachers are responding to the CCSS. I sought to understand the answers to the proposed research questions within this study as a researcher and current practitioner in the field. Thornton and Wenger (1989) discuss that the centrality of gatekeeping in social studies curriculum and instruction raises issues for researchers and leaders in the field. Thornton and Wenger (1989) go on to discuss that although caution should be taken so as not to overgeneralize from small samples, case study research can be a particularly abundant source for understanding gatekeeping and the education of teachers as gatekeepers should be considered a primary focus of teacher education.

Participants

Berg and Lune (2012) discuss when developing a purposeful sample, researchers use their special knowledge or expertise about some group to select subjects who represent this population. For this study five participants were chosen using purposeful sampling. The sampling was purposeful since I needed a very specific group of participants for this study. The sample consisted of five full-time middle school social studies teachers that have been teaching at least two years. Each participant needed to be at least in their second year of teaching middle school social studies. Participants needed to have taught middle school social studies at least one year where only the NGSSS were implemented and, at the time of the study, the current 2014-2015 school year where the NGSSS and CCSS were both being implemented in the school. I recruited participants from one school in one county within Florida. Using middle school social studies teachers from the same school controlled the variance among all five participants. The first five people that volunteered to participate within my study and those that fit my specific criteria were included in the sample. The selection of participants was also one of a convenience sampling, all the participants were from one school in the county that I work and reside.

Participant Inclusion Criteria

1. The participant was a full-time middle school social studies education teacher
2. The participant was from the designated school in the designated county within Florida
3. The participant had at least two years teaching a middle school social studies education course
4. The participant provides written consent (see Appendix E)

Data Collection

Two sources of data were used within this research study. Data was collected through two semi-structured in-depth interviews and teacher artifacts that teachers brought to the second face-to-face interview (lesson plans, unit plans, their planning calendars, student work, etc.). The interviews varied in length: interview one ranged from 30 to 35 minutes and interview two ranged from 40 to 50 minutes. “If the researcher’s goal, however, is to understand the meaning people involved make of their own experience, then interviewing provides a necessary, if not always completely sufficient, avenue of inquiry” (Seidman, 1998, p.5). I wanted each participant to choose a location with which they were comfortable, whether on or off the designated school site or USF campus. Interviews were held at the convenience of each participant. For both interviews, all participants chose to be interviewed at Eastside Middle School immediately after school. Prior to the first interview, participants chose a pseudonym to use for them to maintain confidentiality throughout this study.

I conducted a qualitative case study by examining the topics by collecting data through two in-depth semi-structured interviews (see Appendix F, G, & H). “It is a powerful way to gain insight into educational issues through understanding the experience of the individuals whose lives constitute education” (Seidman, 1998, p.7). Stake (2006) discusses for single-case and multi-case studies, the most common methods of case study include interview, coding, data management, and interpretation. “Interviewing provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior” (Seidman, 1998, p.4). Again, each interview lasted approximately 30 to 50 minutes but depended on the participant.

Open-ended, in-depth questions were included in the interview protocol (See Appendix G & H). Once the data were transcribed from the first interview, a member check was completed. Once the transcription was coded and a peer examination of the transcribed interview had been completed, I proceeded to see if any revisions needed to be made to the predetermined questions for interview number two. Transcription and the coding process will be described in the analysis section and member checks and peer examination will be described in the reliability section of this chapter. The questions for the second interview did not need to be modified based on any specific themes that emerged from the first interview. However, at this time I did have participants elaborate on questions from the first interview. I also asked each participant to bring an artifact to this interview. This artifact could have been a lesson plan, unit plan, their planning calendars, student work, etc. Participants brought lesson plans and student work to use to assist them in their explanation and discussion to me in regards to how the CCSS has affected the instructional strategies they use in their classrooms.

Analysis

The first stage of the analysis process was to transcribe each interview. Since I recorded each interview, I began by listening to the audiotapes. I listened to each recording immediately after each interview was conducted. Listening to each recording straightaway gave me the opportunity to instantly determine if I needed participants to further explain a response. The digital recordings were emailed to a professional transcriber, who then produced a written record of each interview. “Recorded interviews must be transcribed (transformed into written text), corrected, and edited also before being somehow indexed or entered into a text based computer analysis program” (Berg & Lune, 2012). Listening to the recordings helped verify the accuracy of the transcriptions, as well as assisted in the coding process.

Berg and Lune (2012) states that qualitative data need to be reduced and transformed (coded) in order to make them more readily accessible, understandable, and to draw out various themes and patterns. Prior to conducting the second interview it was imperative to sort through the collected data. There were themes that emerged that I needed to elaborate on before proceeding to the next set of questions within each interview. I began to uncover aspects of the study while analyzing the data that needed to be further addressed. I decided to start the coding process by highlighting words that were consistently used among all the participants. After listening to the recordings, and highlighting similarities among the participants I was able to associate codes to search for patterns that eventually led me to common themes. I created spreadsheets to organize and categorize the emerging themes. This data-reduction and transformation process took place continually throughout the span of my research. Berg and Lune (2012) also discusses the importance of data display, explaining that data display is part of the analysis process. Data display is intended to “convey the idea that data are presented as an organized, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusions to be analytically drawn, displays may involve tables of data, tally sheets of themes; summaries and similarly reduced and transformed grouping of data” (Berg & Lune, 2012). These displays of information assisted me in determining what additional analysis needed to be done. In order to validate the data, multiple methods were used in order to minimize potential researcher bias. During the second interview participants were asked to bring artifacts that would assist while describing the types of instructional strategies they chose to use while implementing the CCSS. Teachers brought lesson plans, specific activities that were used when implementing the CCSS in their classrooms, and samples of student work. Teachers used the artifacts to enhance their discussion and also added to the reliability of the study.

Reliability

Triangulation of the data collected was used to check for researcher credibility. I used data from two semi-structured, in-depth interviews and participants brought artifacts to the second interview to help validate the types of instructional strategies they used in their classroom. Finding similarities among participants will strengthen the validity among the data.

Member checks were conducted after each interview. “Following each interview, member checks will be performed; thereby transferring the validity process to the study’s participants” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p.127). Participants were provided via email a copy of their typed transcripts for examination. During the member checks, participants were asked to validate the accuracy of their transcript; at this time they informed me if anything needed to be added or clarified. “Member checks are a critical strategy in establishing credibility” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p.27). Stake (2006) also explains that member checking is a vital technique for field researchers, after gathering data and drafting a report---the researcher asks the main actor or interviewee to read it for accuracy and possible misrepresentation.

Peer examination was also used. Once the data had been analyzed and coded, I formed a panel of two experts in the field to review the analysis and coding for inter-rater reliability. Experts in the field were defined as fellow colleagues that have taught middle school social studies for at least five years and have had experience with the CCSS. “Using multiple analysts working independently to analyze the same data set and comparing the findings allows for the reduction of certain biases” (Patton, 1999, p. 1195). Researcher reflexivity was also used throughout my research.

Through a researcher’s reflective journal, I attempted to understand and reflect on my own beliefs, values, and biases of the research I was conducting. As a practicing social studies

classroom teacher and PhD student I had to be cognizant of my own knowledge of the CCSS and the types of instructional practices I use and I had to ensure this would not influence any participants' responses given to me throughout the course of my research. Also, I had to be careful to not be biased towards the instructional practices that participants reported using in their classrooms.

An audit trail was also kept. I kept a detailed record of the date and time spent with each participant during each interview. This can be used to document and validate that sufficient time was spent in the field to claim dependable and confirmable results.

Finally, a thick and detailed description was completed. I reported quotes to provide evidence of my interpretations and conclusions of my study. Thick description is one that, Gibbs (2008) describes as demonstrating the richness of what is happening and emphasizing the way that it involves people's intentions and strategies; from such a 'thick' description it is possible to go one stage further and offer an explanation for what is happening.

Limitations

A possible limitation of my study was that I looked specifically at teachers at one specific school in a specific county within Florida. Another limitation of this study is that I did not use participant observation as a data collection method. I did not observe teachers while they used specific instructional strategies in their classrooms; rather I conducted two semi-structured in-depth open-ended interviews where they described the types of instructional strategies they used while implementing the CCSS in their classrooms. The small sample of participants for this study is purposeful and one of convenience; as such, it's not designed to be generalizable.

Ethical Considerations

For this proposed study there was no potential harm to the subjects' participation. As soon as I successfully defended my dissertation proposal, I submitted to the IRB for approval to work with human subjects through USF. Once my proposal was approved, I began to look for participants that met my participant criteria. Since I used middle social studies teachers from one designated school, I began to seek my participants immediately. I already had a letter created that briefed each potential participant about the study and the semi-structured in-depth interview process. Via email, I sent each potential participant the letter. I had each participant contact me within one week and at that time I sent them the informed consent forms. The signed informed consent document was returned to me at our first face-to-face interview. As compensation for their time, participants were given a \$10 Publix gift card for each interview and \$10 Publix gift card for the verification of their transcribed interviews. In order to compensate for their time, I purchased all snacks during each of the two interviews that took place over the course of the study. Ongoing informed consent was a part of this research study. Participants were surveyed for questions or concerns at the beginning of each communication session with me. Participants were also reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time for any reason.

Institutional Review Board

This study was submitted for review and approved by the University of South Florida's Institutional Review Board (IRB). All federal guidelines regarding ethics and care for the participants were adhered to. Copies of the IRB approval and participant letter are provided as appendices (see Appendix B).

Role of the Researcher

Participants were pulled from one specific school to control the variance among participants. Eastside Middle School was chosen out of convenience since I had previously been a teacher there and was currently on educational/professional leave. I previously worked with all but one of the participants in the past. Two of the five participants were in the same Professional Learning Community as me, meaning I was communicating and collaborating with both of them on a weekly basis. I also served as department head so I worked with the other two participants occasionally. Previously working with four of the five participants worked to my advantage during data collection. Since a relationship was already established, I believe participants felt comfortable with me discussing with me many of the topics within this study. I also feel participants were honest and open with me due to the previous relationship that was established. A possible disadvantage of previously working with the participants is that they may have told me what they thought I wanted to hear rather than speaking truthfully but, as the data reveals, I do not think this was the case in this particular study. Participants' responses seemed to be genuine and they didn't refrain from opening up to me when discussing how they feel inadequately prepared to fully implement the CCSS and while discussing the challenges they have experienced while implementing the CCSS. The reflective journal, discussed further in Chapter 4, is vital in an instance such as this when previous relationships have been established with the researcher. As a practicing social studies classroom teacher, PhD student, and having a prior relationship with most of the participants I had to be cognizant of my own knowledge of the CCSS and the types of instructional practices I use and I had to ensure this would not influence any participants' responses given to me throughout the course of my research.

CHAPTER 4:

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine how the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) might affect the instructional decision-making of middle school social studies teachers, the types of instructional strategies teacher report using while implementing the CCSS as well as examining any successes and/or challenges teachers experienced while implementing the CCSS. In this chapter, the qualitative data collected within this case study are analyzed and examined to answer the following five research questions guiding this study:

- 1) To what extent does the CCSS influence middle school social studies teachers' decision-making in the types of instructional strategies they choose to use in their classrooms?
- 2) What specific types of instructional strategies do middle school social studies teachers report to use when implementing the CCSS?
- 3) To what extent do middle school social studies teachers feel adequately prepared to make decisions regarding the types of instructional strategies they choose to use to implement the CCSS in their classrooms?
- 4) What instructional successes do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS into their classrooms?

- 5) What instructional challenges do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS into their classrooms?

The qualitative data collections consisted of two semi-structured, in-depth interviews of five middle school social studies teachers from a public school district in Florida. Questions were designed to explore to what extent the CCSS might affect the instructional decision-making of middle school social studies teachers, the types of instructional strategies teacher report using while implementing the CCSS, and any possible successes and/or challenges teachers may experience while implementing the CCSS. Due to the nature of qualitative research, research question # 2 changed throughout the course of this study. Originally it stated, what specific types of instructional strategies do middle school social studies teachers plan to use when implementing the CCSS? Once the data was collected and analyzed it was determined “plan to use” should be modified to “report to use”.

Data Collection

As stated in Chapter 3, once my five participants were identified, I coordinated our first face-to-face interview. Participants were identified using purposeful sampling based on specific criteria. Each participant had to be a middle school social studies teacher who has been teaching at least two years, one year in which the CCSS were not mandated and one year in which they were. Participants were pulled from one specific school to control the variance among participants. Eastside Middle School was chosen out of convenience since I had previously been a teacher there and was currently on educational/professional leave. I previously worked with all but one of the participants in the past and feel that this was an advantage during data collection. Interviews were held at a convenient location for each participant and both interviews were

digitally recorded. For both interviews, all participants chose to be interviewed at Eastside Middle School immediately after school. Prior to the first interview, participants chose a pseudonym to use for themselves to maintain confidentiality throughout this study. The interviews varied in length: interview one ranged from 30 to 35 minutes and interview two ranged from 40 to 50 minutes. At the conclusion of both interviews, participants received a \$10 gift card as compensation for their time.

The digital recordings were emailed to a professional transcriber, who then produced a written record of each interview. Once the interviews were transcribed, I emailed the written transcription to each participant. To increase accuracy and validity, member checks were conducted, wherein participants were asked to review the transcripts for any corrections that needed to be made as well as to inform me if anything needed to be added or clarified. Upon concluding the member checks, each participant received an additional \$10 gift card for his or her time. All five participants confirmed that their transcripts were accurate.

Participants

All five participants were current teachers at Eastside Middle School located in Central Florida. Eastside is considered a suburban middle school. Based on information from the school district website, the student demographics consists of the following: 53% white, 26% Hispanic, 13% black, 4% Multiracial, 3% Asian, and 1% American Indian. 49% of the students at Eastside receive free or reduced lunch.

A brief description of each of the participants is provided below and further summarized in the chart shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Data of Five Participants

	Nancy	Marie	Felicia	Anshus	Rusty
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male
Ethnicity	White	White	Multi-Ethnic	White	White
Years Teaching	21	4	4	18	10
Year/Area Graduated from University	1993-Tampa Bay Area	2010-Orlando Area	2010-Tampa Bay Area	1996-Tampa Bay Area	2005-Indiana
Years at Eastside	4.5	1	3	13	2
Years Exposed to CCSS	2	3	3	4	1 and ½
Primary Teaching Assignment	Civics (3 Basic & 2 Advanced)	Civics (2 gifted) & U.S. History (2 gifted & 1 Advanced)	World History (Gifted & 1 Advanced)	Civics (3 Basic & 2 Advanced)	U.S. History (3 Basic & 2 Advanced)
Primary Grades	7	7-8	6	7	8
State EOC Associated with Course Taught	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No

All participants of this study were middle school social studies teachers who taught at least two years. Each participant taught middle school social studies at least one year when the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards (NGSSS) were implemented, and at least one year

when the NGSSS and the CCSS were implemented. The participants included three white females, one multi-ethnic female, and one white male. Participants' years of experience teaching middle school social studies ranged from four years to 21 years. The participants' exposure to the CCSS varied from one and a half years to four years and is briefly discussed below. Among the participants, all three grade levels at the school were represented: 6th grade World History, 7th grade Civics, and 8th grade U.S. History. Two teachers taught gifted and advanced placement courses, and three teachers taught basic and advanced placement courses.

Nancy. Nancy is a white female with 21 years of teaching experience. She is certified in 6-12 social science education. Nancy has been at Eastside Middle for four and a half years. Her previous teaching experience has been in the same county as Eastside, and at the middle school level. She teaches three regular classes and two advanced placement 7th grade Civics courses. When asked to describe the courses she teaches, she stated that she uses the curriculum map provided by the district to guide her lessons in both classes, but goes more in-depth with the content and often covers more in a shorter period of time with her advanced classes. She noted that the advanced classes have some additional requirements such as reading a content-based novel and completing two Document-Based Question (DBQ) essays during the year. Nancy has been exposed to the CCSS for two years. She describes first being exposed to the standards in a leadership meeting at Eastside and then often referred to in faculty meetings and leadership meetings as if they were common knowledge. Last year within the Civics Professional Learning Community (PLC) the teachers focused on learning about the CCSS and discussed strategies that could be used to implement the specific standards they were breaking down.

Marie. Marie is a white female with four years of teaching experience. She is certified in 6-12 social science education and is currently working on a Master's degree in Educational

Leadership. Marie has taught at Eastside Middle for one year. Her previous teaching experience was at a high school in another county in Florida. Marie teaches two gifted 7th grade Civics courses, two gifted 8th grade U.S. History courses, and one advanced placement 8th grade U.S. History course. When asked to describe the students she teaches, Marie said that she has noticed that her gifted students are more detail oriented about a subject. Marie has been exposed to the CCSS for three years. Marie has had a different level of exposure to the CCSS when compared to other participants. She comes from a county where she underwent intense CCSS teacher education. The district had each school in the county send a content-specific representative to participate in monthly CCSS staff developments. Marie was her school's content-specific representative for one year. Within the staff developments, teachers would break the standards apart to get a better understanding of them and discuss instructional strategies to use in the classroom, ultimately creating lesson plans based on the CCSS. Each representative then reported back to their schools and shared what they learned and produced. She describes her exposure as initially oblivious to what the CCSS was. Then, she slowly began to understand the standards, and ultimately learned how to implement them.

Felicia. Felicia defines herself as a “mixed” female. Felicia defines mixed as black, white, and Native American. She has a Bachelor's Degree in 6-12 Social Science Education and also holds a middle grades integrated certificate. Felicia is currently working on a Master's in Secondary Social Science Education. She has four years of teaching experience. Felicia has taught at Eastside for three years. Her previous teaching experience was at another middle school in the same county as Eastside. Felicia teaches two gifted 6th grade World History courses, one advanced placement 6th grade World History course, and two gifted 6th grade science courses. When Felicia was asked to describe the courses she taught, she stated that for all her classes she

has students analyze primary and secondary historical documents. The learning is scaffolded so students can develop critical thinking skills such as being able to analyze, evaluate, and making comparisons. Felicia has been exposed to the CCSS for three years. She doesn't recall them being mentioned the first year, but she stated that could have been because she was a first-year teacher and struggling to keep up. The second year it was mentioned as something they were transitioning to, and then last year and the current year, really being implemented. Felicia discusses how last year the U.S. History PLC was used for discussing the CCSS and offering strategies that would be helpful to use during implementation.

Anshus. Anshus is a white female with 18 years teaching experience. She is certified in elementary education and middle grades social studies. Anshus has a Master's degree in Secondary Social Science Education. Anshus has been at Eastside for 13 years. Her previous teaching experience was in the same county as Eastside and at the middle school level. She teaches three regular level and two advanced placement 7th grade Civics courses. When asked to describe the courses she teaches, Anshus stated that both her regular and advanced courses use the same textbook, but the advanced placement courses have different requirements set by the school district. Students have to read a core novel, complete a research project such as History Fair or Project Citizen, or complete a mock trial. Students also complete two DBQs each semester. Anshus has been exposed to the CCSS for four years. She describes her exposure as in the beginning hearing about the standards but felt they didn't really affect her as a social studies teacher; they were primarily focused in the Language Arts department. Anshus further describes that last year in the Civics PLC, time was used to "unpack" the standards and discuss best practices that could be used to assist in the implementation.

Rusty. Rusty is a white male with ten years of teaching experience. Rusty is certified in 6-12 social science education and is currently working on a Master's degree in Educational Leadership. Rusty has been at Eastside for two years. He teaches three regular level and two advanced placement 8th grade U.S. History courses. When Rusty was asked to describe the courses he teaches, he stated that both classes are taught with the goal of helping students connect the past to the present. Rusty also focuses heavily on perspective taking and bias in historical texts and contemporary media, like the news. Rusty tries to keep both classes rigorous, but there are different tests and writing assignment requirements for the advanced classes. He explained that all of the classes generally start from the same place, but differentiation occurs based on the needs of the students. Rusty has been exposed to the CCSS for one and a half years. He explains that his exposure to the CCSS was during the first part of last year in the World History PLC. He stated that for the first part of the year they were told to focus on the CCSS and then midway through the year teachers were told to switch their focus on the NGSSS.

Findings

Overall, the interviews revealed that the CCSS had an influence on the participants' instructional decision-making. Overwhelmingly, participants indicated three key factors that proved to influence their instructional decision-making to implement the CCSS in their classrooms. First, teachers' personal beliefs regarding the CCSS, both positive and negative, influenced their instructional decision-making. Secondly, student assessment- the connection between standardized tests and the CCSS influenced all participants' instructional decision-making. Each participant was aware that the skills tested on the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) and the states End-of-Course (EOC) Assessments are the types of higher order thinking skills within the CCSS. Further, all participants stated that part of their role as a social studies

teacher was to help support Language Arts teachers prepare students for the FSA and EOC by implementing more reading and writing strategies that foster the CCSS. Lastly, participants stated that they believe many of the skills associated with the CCSS are best practices that social studies teachers should use in their classrooms. Each participant reported that at times they already implemented the CCSS since they believed they were best practices. Since teachers stated the CCSS were best practices, this influenced their instructional decision-making. Data analysis reveals key factors that influenced participants' implementation of the CCSS.

Further, participants indicated at times they do not feel adequately prepared to fully implement the CCSS due to insufficient content-specific professional development, limited resources focusing on the CCSS, and an inconsistent focus at the school, district, and state level. Each participant had some level of exposure with the CCSS and each participant implemented the CCSS to some degree but each felt they could have been better prepared to fully execute the higher-level types of Language Arts-based skills in their classrooms. Participants also reported they have experienced both successes and challenges while implementing the CCSS.

Below is an examination of the five research questions from each of the five participants' points of view. Implications of this study and recommendations for classroom practice and further research follow in Chapter 5.

Research Question 1: To what extent does the CCSS influence middle school social studies teachers' decision-making in the types of instructional strategies they choose to use in their classroom?

“Curricular-instructional gatekeeping is a decision-making process often based on unexamined assumptions and conventions, that is, they are not conscious decisions.” (Thornton, 1989, p.1)

As Thornton notes, teachers often make decisions for their classrooms for reasons that are not immediately self-evident to them. As previously discussed in chapter two, there are many factors that influence teachers' decision-making, which may affect their role as instructional gatekeepers. Research question #1 explored the extent the CCSS influences middle school social studies teachers' decision-making in the types of instructional strategies they choose to use in their classrooms. The common theme among participants was that the CCSS have an influence. The CCSS do impact the instructional decision-making of participants, but at times they were not aware of their impact. Although each participant was aware of the skills associated with the CCSS, the actual standards were not the first thing participants looked at when deciding the types of instructional strategies to use in their classrooms.

There were three main factors that influenced teachers' decisions to implement the CCSS in their daily instruction. First, were the individual teacher's beliefs regarding the CCSS, including his or her personal beliefs regarding the CCSS and self-confidence to teach the skills associated with the CCSS. Second, the connection between standardized tests and the CCSS. Third, each participant believed the skills within the CCSS are best practices that social studies teachers should implement in their classrooms regardless of whether or not they are mandated. Participants went on to state that at times they chose instructional strategies that satisfy the CCSS because they feel they are best practices. "I haven't been asked to put them in my lesson plans so, to me, when I'm deciding my instructional strategies, I would say I do it unintentionally most of the time" (Nancy, personal communication, March, 27, 2015).

Participants stated that they felt the CCSS played a small role when deciding what instructional strategies they chose to use, but the standards have made them more conscious of the skills that should be used. "You are more aware and more focused of them so that means

more documented analysis, that means more working on structure year round, writing and the strength of your arguments” (Rusty, personal communication, March 30, 2015). Each participant stated that she or he have not made any major instructional changes since the CCSS were mandated. However, participants all admitted that there has been an increase in their use of these strategies since the implementation of the CCSS. As Felicia stated, “ I do use them more, I used to do a DBQ once a semester, and I’ve done one a quarter now” (Felicia, personal communication, March 24, 2015).

Beliefs that Influence Teachers’ Decision-Making

Each participant had both negative and positive beliefs regarding the CCSS. These views influenced their decision-making in regards to the types of instructional strategies they chose to use in their classrooms. This connection between teachers’ beliefs and their classroom experience was evident in the data. Each participant had both positive and negative beliefs toward the CCSS that influenced his or her decision-making in the extent in which she or he implemented these standards.

Each participant knew that the CCSS require instructional strategies that promote higher order thinking skills and require higher levels of reading and writing. Some participants were more comfortable teaching these skills than others. Participants had varying degrees of confidence in regards to the ability to teach the skills associated with the CCSS. For example, Rusty expressed a high confidence level:

You are reading texts and trying to get deep into the core, and use evidence when you are making arguments or making claims, and so it was just another way to focus on something that we were already doing if you were a good teacher. (Rusty, personal communication, February 15, 2015)

Nancy, on the other hand, said:

I guess as a social studies teacher, I wouldn't want the kids to go to math class and the math teacher teach them something incorrect about civics. So, I feel very concerned when I take on teaching something like that, that I'm going to teach it wrong or go against what the language arts teacher prefers them to do or even confuse them. (Nancy, personal communication, March 27, 2015)

Nancy's initial thoughts of the CCSS was that their purpose was to increase academic rigor and raise the overall expectations for students. Teachers select strategies that encourage students to think for themselves, providing critical thinking types of activities to achieve this aim. Nancy thought the CCSS required more in-depth analysis of concepts, and the integration of more reading and writing opportunities in the content area. Nancy's personal beliefs regarding the CCSS were emergent and neutral: "My personal beliefs really haven't completely formed an opinion. Being in an area of social studies, I don't know that a lot has been shared with us" (Nancy, personal communication, February 2, 2015). Nancy believes one of the values of the CCSS is that all students --- no matter where they come from or where they live and go to school --- should have the same skill set, that is, there should be consistency from grade level to grade level in regards to specific skills being taught. Nancy expressed that an aspect she likes about the CCSS is that they are written per grade level, so for example, there are certain skills all students should know when they get to 7th grade.

She expressed how the transition for teachers and students has been challenging since the expectations of students and teachers have changed so quickly. "I think there should have been a grandfathering process also to allow the teachers, the schools in the districts, to also be more

prepared to implement accurately and to know what resources need to be provided” (Nancy, personal communication, February 2, 2015).

In addition, Nancy expressed frustration because she is not as informed as she would like to be regarding how to implement the CCSS in her classroom. Nancy was very vocal about how she feels inadequate at times since she doesn’t know if she is implementing what she is supposed to. “I feel kind of lost in the shuffle and that maybe I should be seeking out on my own what the Common Core means to me” (Nancy, personal communications, February 2, 2015). Nancy feels pressured, uncomfortable, and overwhelmed at times addressing Language Arts-based skills with which she is not familiar with.

I think a lot of people are stressed out about it. As a profession, we are being judged on a decision that we did not have any part in making and we are doing the best that we can to implement something that we don’t know a lot about. And I’ve said this before, but I feel uncomfortable sometimes addressing it because I really don’t know that much about it. (Nancy, personal communication, February 2, 2015)

Additionally, in the second interview, Nancy expressed concerns that her creativity as an instructor has been stifled. She feels there is not much time for the “fun” activities that she used to do prior to the CCSS, such as having students role play and conducting simulations. Some students are resistant to the increased number of reading and writing activities because they feel they should be doing more “fun” things in social studies, rather than work they feel should be done in Language Arts classes. Since Nancy spends so much time on reading and writing skills, she feels there is no time left for projects deemed more enjoyable to students.

But because I'm so busy trying to make sure that we're reading from the text, and we're pulling out evidence, and we're writing, I feel like I don't have time for that fun, and it's always serious, focused work, and it's kind of made it to where school is not fun anymore, even for me. (Nancy, personal communication, March 27, 2015)

Nancy feels there are fewer varieties of activities that can be used, and less opportunity for creative learning activities.

Overall, Marie had a very positive association with the CCSS. She previously came from another school district that provided multiple CCSS professional development opportunities to her, so her level of comfort and acceptance of the standards was evident throughout both interviews. When I asked Marie during the first interview what the CCSS meant to her she at first stated, "Nothing, absolutely nothing, because I already do this, so it is not something I have to do again" (Marie, personal communication, February 9, 2015). She stated that the CCSS meant students analyzing documents and an increase in the use of reading and writing strategies. She expressed that she likes the strategies, feels they are best practices, and believes they are appropriate for students. Marie added that the CCSS increases the variety and the types of instructional strategies she can use. Adding another element, she believes CCSS encourages students to think "outside the box" by providing different and more complex ways of thinking and learning about social studies concepts.

Marie credits her appreciation of the CCSS to the staff developments she had in her previous school district. Even though Marie projected more self-confidence than Nancy with respect to teaching with the CCSS, Marie still sometimes questions her ability in implementing the CCSS correctly. During Marie's second interview, she further explained that once she

masters her content (since Civics and U.S History are new teaching preparations for her), she plans on spending more time systematically planning for the incorporation of the CCSS into her instruction.

Felicia interprets the CCSS as an increase in academic rigor, specifically, the citation of evidence from primary and secondary sources to support academic arguments. Like Nancy, Felicia noted that the CCSS are beneficial since no matter what state students come from they will be receiving the same skill set. Under CCSS, all students will be held to the same high scholastic expectations. Felicia also agreed with Nancy when she stated that the transition for teachers and students has not been an easy one since there has been an increase in the use of these types of skills.

I feel like the transition has been very sudden and it is very new for both teachers and students. I feel like it is difficult to just kind of jump in with something so quickly and with the testing that comes with it and all of that. (Felicia, personal communication, February 9, 2015)

Felicia does not want students to have a negative association with the skills associated with Document-Based Questions (DBQ), so she doesn't over-utilize this strategy in her classroom. DBQs require analyzing and interpreting primary and secondary sources, and then pulling out evidence to write a cohesive essay answering a specific question connected to the documents. Felicia stated that she already uses these skills in her classroom and uses the skills within the CCSS when necessary; she projects a high level of confidence when discussing her usage of the strategies.

I see it as I'm a social studies teacher who's teaching social studies skills, and so in terms of the way I teach and deciding factors, it doesn't play a role, but I am

doing the things necessary like using graphs and timelines and primary and secondary sources and things like that. (Felicia, personal communication, March 24, 2015)

To Anshus, the CCSS means analyzing primary and secondary sources, using more reading and writing strategies, and having a common set of standards to which all teachers in the nation strive. She noted that having common standards are a good idea, but what the state does with them is problematic. Anshus expressed concern regarding how states use the standards to hold students and teachers accountable. Anshus compared social studies to a “Gordon Rule class” in college since social studies teachers are essentially teaching reading and writing. The Gordon Rule requires students to demonstrate college-level writing skills through different assignments. Certain college courses are designated as Gordon Rule, where students can fulfill this requirement. “The CCSS infused in social studies classes is a nice way to say we assist in reading and writing skills” (Anshus, personal communication, April 2, 2015).

A concern for Anshus is that there has been a lack of emphasis on the CCSS for social studies and she doesn't think there is a true connection between the CCSS and social studies. When describing her exposure to the CCSS she stated that last year teachers were, “thrown in head-first, the deep end” (Anshus, personal communication, February 12, 2015). Elaborating, Anshus believes she should have had her students write more, but acknowledged it's not her “forté”. She admitted not being good at spelling and feels uncomfortable editing the papers her students write. Like Nancy, Anshus feels challenged having to teach CCSS skills with which she herself isn't comfortable. Anshus described her frustrations with teaching writing and was quite honest about her dislike for teaching writing. “I don't tend to have them write as much as I

should, I don't like teaching and grading writing" (Anshus, personal communication, April 2, 2015).

Unlike Nancy, Anshus doesn't feel her creativity has been stifled due to the CCSS. However, Anshus stated there is a shortage of time for activities such as role-playing and simulations, which she knows engage her students. With the added skills required by the CCSS, Anshus feels more pressure to get things done and scattered at times to fit in both the required content and higher order thinking skills. "There is much more pressure to get things done and there are more interruptions because you've got this ticking time bomb, you know, you've got to learn X, Y and Z between Monday and Wednesday" (Anshus, personal communication, April 2, 2015).

Rusty described the CCSS as reading texts and trying to "get deep into the core" of reading materials and documents, and using evidence when making arguments or making claims. He believes the skills within the CCSS are skills that effective practicing teachers already implement, and skills that students need to know. "The standards themselves are, I think, high and there is benefit to be gained from them" (Rusty, personal communication, February 15, 2015). Rusty declared that if the standards are used for increasing rigor, he agrees teachers should focus on them. But like Anshus, Rusty believes that when the CCSS are used in a high stakes environment to track students and hold teachers accountable, the practice is "borderline unethical" (Rusty, personal communication, February 15, 2015). Rusty seemed bitter when discussing the standards in regards to the state's legislature; he expressed concern that the legislature is probably going to change what is mandated again soon anyway. Rusty is extremely frustrated at not being informed by the district and the limited communication and inconsistency regarding the CCSS.

The emphasis has not been there, which at the end of one semester working on it seems strange, but to me it was really something we've---or at least I have always tried to in classes---you are reading texts and trying to get deep into the core, and use evidence when you are making arguments or making claims, and so it was just another way to focus on something that we were already doing if you were a good practicing teacher. (Rusty, personal communication, February 15, 2015).

He added that recently he has gotten really good at teaching these types of skills and is seeing the payoff with his students. He has witnessed an overall improvement with his students' reading and writing skills. Rusty communicated that in no way does he feel the CCSS stifles his creativity, explaining that a creative teacher can always find a way to incorporate what needs to be incorporated and still make learning engaging and interesting while still accomplishing the standards.

In Rusty's second interview he made it known that many of the skills associated with the CCSS are very much aligned with his own personal core beliefs. He explained that exploring perspective and differing points of view---as mandated by the CCSS---are essential components of a social justice orientation. This orientation is important to him, as well as not maintaining the status quo:

I am not interested in the content that they take away from history. I want them to take these core values, perspective matters, and to question and critique everything. These are two main things I want them to walk out with and just be open minded and that sort of thing. (Rusty, personal communication, March 30, 2015)

Standardized Tests and the Implementation of the CCSS

Each participant was aware that the skills tested on the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) were based off the CCSS. “They [teachers] give you [student] the documents, you read them. Then they [students] have a question, they interpret the documents and answer the question” (Marie, personal communication, April 6, 2015). Marie like the other participants were able to describe the types of questions asked on the FSA and further explained how they chose instructional strategies that supported the Language Arts-based skills within the CCSS.

The three participants that have state End-of-Course (EOC) Assessments associated with their grade level were also familiar with the types of questions asked on the EOC. The questions are content-based but the format of the questions is skill-based. All participants identified their role in supporting Language Arts teachers in preparing students for the mandatory standardized tests. Participants reinforced reading and writing skills within their social studies classes to help prepare students for standardized tests and to act as direct support systems to Language Arts teachers. These two factors influenced teachers’ decision-making in the types of instructional strategies they chose to use in their classrooms. When asked, “as a social studies educator, what’s your role in preparing the students for the FSA assessment?” Nancy responded:

Definitely the use of informational text in the classroom and then periodically incorporating writing pieces where they have to pull evidence out of it, also there are some speaking and listening standards included in the language arts, and there are opportunities for us to support in that manner (Nancy, personal communication, March 27, 2015)

Nancy was aware that the FSA is based on the CCSS. She provided the example of having students complete tasks such as comparing two different informational texts and then responding in writing, and then having students pull factual evidence out of the articles to support a prompt in relation to the text. She supports the Language Arts teachers by having students read informational texts based on social studies content and by having students cite evidence from the reading to answer questions or support their arguments. Nancy also has students complete DBQ writing pieces using evidence from the text they read. She explains:

Well, when I think of Common Core, as far as supporting language arts, reading and writing and in civics or social studies, we are to incorporate document-based questions and then from that, the kids do a writing piece. They analyze documents, and then eventually it culminates into an essay and in that essay they are supposed to cite evidence from the documents. Opposed to back when it was FCAT writing and they were told they could make up their facts because all they were looking for is that they knew how to support an essay well. Now they actually have to prove it. (Nancy, personal communication, March 27, 2015)

Nancy is mindful of the types of questions on the Civics EOC, stating that students are asked to complete tasks such as: reading a chart and examining the information, making comparisons based on facts, and analyzing an excerpt from an important historical document. She explained, “Analyzing the documents is something I feel is really important and also preparing them for the end-of-course exam” (Nancy, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Nancy described how through the Civics PLC, these were the types of skills they noticed were included in the Language Arts/Social Studies CCSS so the teachers tried to incorporate them while deciding what types of instructional strategies to use. “I noticed last year our PLC spent a

lot of time on primary and secondary sources” (Nancy, personal communication, February 2, 2015). Nancy expressed that it is important to incorporate the types of strategies that support the FSA and the EOC into her content on a weekly, if not daily, basis.

Marie is mindful that the FSA is based on the CCSS. She supports the Language Arts teachers by having students analyze and interpret evidence found in documents and by having students answer questions based on that evidence. She explained it is similar to the skills seen within a DBQ. Marie shared that, in regards to the practice writing section of the FSA, “Actually kids told me that it’s a lot like the DBQs they’ve been doing” (Marie, personal communication, April 6, 2015).

Marie is also cognizant of the types of questions on the Civics EOC, describing that students are asked to examine a graph or picture and then analyze and interpret the information to make meaning. She also utilizes political cartoons in her class, “I’ve heard they’re big on the EOC. I’m kind of trying to get them to analyze and be able to realize what the author is thinking or why they drew it or whatever the political cartoon or document, why they’re important” (Marie, personal communication, April 6, 2015). Marie explained that students would need to be able to think more critically when examining political cartoons and graphics in order to succeed on the EOC.

She further explained that her gifted population will need to be prepared for Advanced Placement (AP) courses in high school and many of them will also be accepted into the International Baccalaureate (IB) Program. The types of higher order skills students will need to know to succeed in AP courses, as well as the IB program are the types of higher order skills associated with the CCSS.

Felicia knew that the FSA is based on the CCSS. She described that the FSA requires students to make comparisons. “It’s using details, so it’s you [student] read story A, you read story B, now answer a prompt, but as you answer a prompt, use evidence from story A and B to support your thinking” (Felicia, personal communication, March 24, 2015). After Felicia’s students completed the practice FSA they mentioned to her that they had to write an essay and within the essay they had to prove their response using information they had gathered within the reading passages provided. She explained that since her school was in testing season, the FSA/CCSS was being mentioned more frequently, and she reflected on the changes that needed to be made to support students in scoring as highly as possible on these required assessments.

Felicia promotes Language Arts-based skills in her social studies classes by using primary sources where students make inferences and predict what they think was taking place during a specific time period. Felicia also stated she has her students complete DBQs which implement many of these skills. Felicia proclaimed since this is the first year of FSA testing, she is going to continue to use the instructional strategies in her classroom. However, she stated that she feels inclined to put more of an emphasis on the standards next year, due to increased administrative pressure.

So if that means CCSS, then that's what it is. If it is something else in five years that I generally agree with and is as high stakes and required (even if I don't agree but doesn't go against my own moral beliefs), then I will do it. (Felicia, personal communication, March 24, 2015)

Anshus was aware that the FSA is based on the CCSS. “You have a lot of taking excerpts out of documents and then being able to understand the content from the excerpt and you still have some inference, you know, which is hard” (Anshus, personal communication, April 2,

2015). She supports the Language Arts teachers by reinforcing reading and writing skills in her class. She incorporates more primary and secondary sources for students to analyze and interpret since she knows that these are the skills tested on the FSA. Anshus has her regular level classes view, analyze, and answer questions based on primary and secondary sources and has her advanced classes complete DBQs.

She is aware of the types of questions that appear on the EOC, and explained that students have to make references to pictures and have to understand and interpret excerpts from primary and secondary documents. Discussing the DBQ process and the types of skills associated with the DBQ, Anshus stated, “And all of that, which again, you know, it’s a good procedure. I mean it’s good to have them do that and be in that mode because it does show up on EOC” (Anshus, personal communication, April 2, 2015). Anshus thus believes the CCSS support the types of skills that are assessed on the course EOC.

Rusty was conscious that the FSA is based on the CCSS. He supports the Language Arts teachers by reinforcing reading and writing skills specifically through having students analyze different perspectives on various issues and examining point of view. “My role as I understand it is to help them in those areas like reading and writing and so again, with using a lot of supplements we have tried to home in on those skills” (Rusty, personal communication, March 30, 2015). During the second interview, Rusty proclaimed through analyzing text and exploring where the source is coming from, and using factual evidence to bolster arguments, he feels he is achieving the goal of supporting Language Arts teachers.

CCSS are Best Practices

Participants stated that the skills associated with the CCSS are best practices that social studies teachers should use in their classrooms. Each participant identified the CCSS as best

practices that at times are already utilized in his/her classroom. Further, participants felt that many of the higher order thinking skills, such as analyzing primary and secondary sources, within the CCSS are skills that they already try to implement. The belief that the skills within the CCSS are best practices influenced their decision-making in the types of instructional strategies teachers chose to use in their classrooms.

I just feel like the activities I do with them just so happen to be aligned with Common Core; like the DBQs I end up doing with them. I feel like I can always look at my lesson plans and what I did and then go back and look at the Common Core Standards and realize that something matches. (Felicia, personal communication, February 9, 2015)

At times within the discussion, participants discussed skills associated with the CCSS such as analyzing and interpreting primary and secondary sources without directly calling them the CCSS. “Definitely raising the expectations and when you are selecting assignments, choosing strategies that make the kids think more for themselves, more critical thinking types activities” (Nancy, personal communication, February 2, 2015). All participants reported the implementation of some of the skills within the CCSS without specifically stating they were doing so. Participants did not realize the extent in which they utilized instructional strategies that were connected to the CCSS because so many of them are best practices.

Nancy voiced that she does not always purposefully implement instructional strategies in order to address the CCSS into her instruction. However, she does incorporate reading and writing strategies that can be found within the CCSS more than she used to when she can. She collaborates with the Language Arts teacher on her team regarding what she or he are working on and how she can implement instructional strategies in her class that will reinforce those

specific skills. Nancy stated the CCSS plays a small role when deciding the types of instructional strategies she chooses to use in her class since she feels many are best practices.

Currently they are reading *The Giver* and I looked at the literature standards and there were a few things in terms of plot and analyzing characters that I could see that I was supporting that. That, again, was something unintentional. (Nancy, personal communication, March 27, 2015)

Nancy stated that the types of instructional strategies she chooses, such as having students analyze primary and secondary sources is something that she has had students do for quite some time. These are the types of Language Arts-based skills associated with the CCSS. She went on to state that she would like to learn more strategies that can be used to effectively implement the higher-level types of skills associated with the CCSS that she is less familiar with, but many of the instructional strategies that she already uses naturally complement the CCSS.

Marie declared she does not always purposefully implement CCSS, but she runs across them by coincidence, through skills she already utilizes. “I mean, when I did Common Core, I thought, oh, I already do this, so it is not something I have to implement again” (Marie, personal communication, February 9, 2015). Marie stated since the implementation of the CCSS at the state level, she uses more reading and writing strategies such as: having students look at documents, analyze them, and then use the information within them to write about a topic. She also has students complete DBQs. “DBQs probably stick out the most more at the middle school level that I’ve done. Primary and secondary sources, those are pretty popular in Common Core, more reading, more writing about the reading, those types of things” (Marie, personal communication, February 9, 2015).

Like Nancy, she feels the CCSS are best practices that at times were already used in her

classroom. “I don’t really look at the Common Core standards that are in the curriculum guide, I guess they kind of fall where they fall for me” (Marie, personal communication, April 6, 2015). Marie explained that the types of activities she implements in her classroom are those that she knows will prepare her students for the types of skills needed to succeed on standardized tests and Advanced Placement courses in high school. As already discussed Marie was aware that the types of skills within the standardized assessments are the same types of skills within the CCSS.

Felicia also discussed that she does not always purposefully implement instructional strategies in order to address the CCSS. Like other participants, she feels she already utilizes some of the skills associated with the CCSS. She stated they are best practices, skills that should be taught to students. Additionally, she doesn’t feel applying the CCSS is much different from what she has been doing. Felicia explained that having her students utilize photographs, charts, and maps is normal practice in her classroom.

Felicia discussed that the instructional strategies she uses in her classroom are those that a good social studies teacher should be doing, regardless of whether teachers are told to do so because of mandated standards. She is aware that the higher order thinking skills within the CCSS are ones that students are going to need to master to be successful in high school and college.

I want my students to understand the 'how' and 'why' of history but I am not willing to just tell them, I want them to discover answers for themselves and to formulate their own judgment, DBQs and text analysis do that. My role in the classroom is to scaffold and assist them with the knowledge they gain, not to tell them information and expect them to get the whole picture. Don't get me wrong, I do lecture and they do get book work but such methods don't always develop the

'investigation' and analysis skills they will need to have for high school and college. (Felicia, personal communication, March 24, 2015)

Anshus reported that at times she does not purposefully use instructional strategies to address the CCSS; she believes she already uses these skills from time to time and stated that many of the CCSS are best practices. "Common Core State Standards that lend themselves to social studies were primarily primary and secondary documents/sources. So, that is something that social studies is going to inherently, no matter what" (Anshus, personal communication, February 12, 2015). She previously stated that social studies classes are essentially reading classes, where teachers support both reading and writing skills. She feels she already implements some of the skills within the CCSS since, generally speaking, she believes they are best practices.

However, Anshus was clear in her desire to have more support and teacher education to fully implement the CCSS in her classroom. She stated she definitely has room for improvement in utilizing other CCSS-focused instructional strategies to use in her classroom.

Rusty communicated that often times he does not purposefully implement instructional strategies in order to address the CCSS. He proclaimed that he already implements the types of instructional strategies that put into action the CCSS since many of them are best practices.

No, I don't purposefully plan with those standards in mind, but it's things we have to be able to do to write essays and make arguments and create thesis statements and all of that stuff that goes into kind of thinking deeper about things but I don't start out with Common Core Standards in mind. (Rusty, personal communication, February 15, 2015)

During the second interview, Rusty explained that exposing students to multiple perspectives and teaching them to question sources for bias and reliability really homes in on these types of skills. He added, that he fosters this type of thinking on a daily basis and these are types of questions that should always be on his students' minds; such as, point of view, bias, and relevancy.

Overall Impact of CCSS on Teachers' Decision-Making

Participants stated that they have not made any major instructional changes since the mandated implementation of the CCSS. However, they further stated that there has been an increased level of awareness to implement more instructional strategies that foster the CCSS in their classrooms. As previously discussed there were three main factors that influenced teachers' instructional decision-making to implement the CCSS. Participants' responses varied when directly asked what types of factors do play a role when deciding which instructional strategies to use in their classrooms.

Nancy explained that she doesn't feel she has made any major instructional changes since the mandated implementation of the CCSS, but has an increased consciousness of the types of rigorous strategies she should be using. She stated she tries to use more strategies that support the Reading Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) on a daily basis. Often, there is an overlap between the CCSS and the FSA; that is, skills called for in the FSA are promoted by strategies used to implement the CCSS. Furthermore, she expressed that it's important to incorporate the types of strategies that support the skills within the FSA in her content area regularly.

Nancy stated the CCSS has had little impact on her curricular or instructional decision-making in her classroom. Available time was the number one factor Nancy identified when asked how she decided what instructional strategies to use in her classroom. She wants to ensure she will get through all the content so students are prepared for the Civics EOC at the end of the

school year. As such, she takes into consideration how much time learning activities take and plans accordingly to maximize instructional time in the classroom.

Nancy predicted that the CCSS would have more of an impact on her decision-making during the 2015-2016 school year due to the continued FSA testing. Nancy stated that she plans on approaching the CCSS differently next year. She clearly stated that upon reflecting our discussions that emanated from the two interviews, she now feels it is her responsibility to find resources that will help her fully implement the CCSS in her classroom. “I do feel more responsibility for getting more information about the standards” (Nancy, personal communication, March 27, 2015). She stated that she plans on looking over the CCSS as she decides which instructional strategies she will choose to use to ensure that she is providing ample support to the Language Arts teachers and better prepare her students for end-of-year testing. Nancy communicated, “I also think our PLC needs to meet at least monthly with ELA teachers to plan ways to support them” (Nancy, personal communication, March 27, 2015).

Marie discussed that she doesn't feel she has made any major instructional changes since the mandated implementation of the CCSS, but confirmed there has been an increase in her use of specific types of strategies. She uses political cartoons at least once a week and frequently incorporates other types of activities where students are expected to analyze charts, graphs, and primary and secondary documents.

Marie asserted that the CCSS has had little impact on her decision-making in her classroom. When Marie was asked what plays a role when deciding what instructional strategies she uses in her classroom, she identified two factors: examining the state standards and previewing the vocabulary in textbook. Marie previously taught World Cultures, Geography, Economics, and two weeks of Government, so the Civics and U.S. History curriculum is new to

her. She explained: “I look at the standards, I look at the basic vocab. These are new subjects to me, I don’t really know what I’m doing in terms of teaching certain vocab words or certain content within the unit” (Marie, personal communication, April 6, 2015). Marie expressed that the more she learns about the CCSS the more of an impact they are having on the strategies she uses in her classroom, but mastering her content is her top priority. “The more I learn about how to properly use the CCSS it has really encouraged me to change my classroom teaching style a bit” (Marie, personal communication, April 6, 2015).

Overall, Marie stated she would continue to choose the strategies she currently uses until she masters her content since her teaching assignment has changed from year to year. “Once I master my content then my hope is to implement a lot of different types of instructional strategies for my students and the Common Core would definitely be part of that implementation” (Marie, personal communication, April 6, 2015). Marie expressed that the CCSS should be addressed in schools and teachers should be guided as to how to properly implement them.

Felicia shared she has not made any major changes in her instructional or curricular planning since the mandated implementation of the CCSS. However, like Nancy, she feels she is more conscious in using these skills in her class by having students analyze and interpret timelines, graphs, and documents more often. Felicia has students work with primary and secondary sources on a weekly basis at some level. “It might not be an in depth analysis, but I like to do something as simple as analyzing a quote as an activation activity at the start of a lesson” (Felicia, personal communication, March 24, 2015). She explained that she used to have students complete a DBQ once a semester and now this occurs at least once a quarter. However, she doesn’t have them complete the fully developed essay every time because she doesn’t want

them to get a negative association with DBQs by having them complete them all the time.

Felicia believes that although the CCSS has had an effect on her decision-making as a teacher, it has not been a significant one. Examining the content standards, thinking about how she can make her students interested, how they are going to best receive the information, and keeping her students engaged were the factors Felicia first identified when asked what plays a role when deciding what instructional strategies she uses in her classroom.

So, if it's something that is a topic that tends to be a little bit drier, I usually go for visuals, more visuals, and auditory aspects since most of my kids are visual or auditory. If it's something that the kids have expressed an interest in, then I know that I can do something more discussion-based or lecture-based because they'll be interested in carrying out a discussion. (Felicia, personal communication, March 24, 2015)

Felicia stated that she is still going to plan according to how her students will learn best, but she wants to make more of an effort to go back through her lesson and incorporate more CCSS, as not all her lessons do.

Anshus explained that she hasn't made any major instructional changes since the mandated implementation, but like two of her fellow colleagues, Nancy and Felicia, she stated the CCSS make her more conscious of higher order thinking skills and she tries to incorporate them more now into her instruction. She tries to have students analyze and use primary and secondary sources more, adding that she now more frequently incorporates replicas of documents for students to view. Her students complete a writing activity based on a DBQ only about twice a year, but she has her students examine an array of documents, pictures, charts, and sections of documents or speeches often.

Anshus identified two factors that she feels play a role when deciding what instructional strategies to use in her classroom. First is her knowledge of what she knows works best, since she has 18 years of teaching experience. Second, she believes that this experience also informs her of how best to get her students engaged in the learning process. “Well, at this point I’ve taught for 18 years so history, my history [influences me]. What I know has worked. What the students have responded to as far as they like this, they didn’t like that and this worked and that didn’t” (Anshus, personal communication, April 2, 2015).

Rusty explained he has not made any major instructional changes due to the CCSS. However, he feels the standards make him more conscious of the skills associated with them and he definitely feels he incorporates them into his teaching more now. “You are more aware and more focused on them [CCSS] so that means more documented analysis, that means more working on structure year round, writing, and the strength of your arguments” (Rusty, personal communication, March 30, 2015). Explaining he is always using these strategies in his classroom conversations, the use of point of view, bias, and relevancy never stops, stating he is, “Probably knee deep in a document at least once a week” (Rusty, personal communication, March 30, 2015).

Overall, the CCSS has had a small impact on Rusty’s decision-making in his classroom. Available instructional time (deciding what to leave in and out), how he can help students function efficiently, and keeping students engaged were the first three factors Rusty identified when asked what plays a role in deciding what types of instructional strategies he chooses to use in his classroom. He asserted his belief that the CCSS are like any other standards --- something that is considered and are used to make a framework for his teaching.

History, more than any other subject, is about thinking and questioning. It's about analyzing the available evidence and drawing conclusions. This is something I have always tried to promote because it is a crucial part of being successful in this country (or any country) and being an active, civic-minded participant. (Rusty, personal communication, March 30, 2015)

Rusty explained that within his PLC he is going to be more focused on the CCSS, but he will not allow the standards to consume the teachers within his PLC decision-making.

Despite the best efforts to convince us otherwise, there is more to education than standards, so we [teachers] will also continue to help students find success beyond standardized tests. We will help them be more than what the data says they are and maintain their dignity. We will also teach them to question things, ask questions, and become good citizens. (Rusty, personal communication, March 30, 2015)

Research Question 2: What specific types of instructional strategies do middle school social studies teachers report to use when implementing the CCSS?

As described in Chapter Two, the English Language Arts (ELA) standards for History/Social Studies Grade 6-8 are broken down into four categories: Key Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, and Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity. Each category has a set of standards that outlines the specific skills that should be implemented. As the participants described the specific types of instructional strategies they reported using when implementing the CCSS in their classrooms, it was evident that they were applying standards from all four of the categories.

Each participant reported implementing instructional strategies that require students to analyze, interpret, and use evidence pulled from an array of primary and secondary source documents including: text, charts, graphs, and pictures. As Anshus explained:

Students take the documents or just pictures or charts or sections of documents or speeches or other things like that and looking at them and answering questions or pictures and looking at the pictures and really trying to figure out what's going on in this picture, fairly often. (Anshus, personal communication, April 2, 2015)

As each participant expounded upon how she or he has students analyze primary and secondary sources and ultimately complete a Document-Based Question (DBQ), it was determined that each participant was fulfilling two of the three standards from Key Ideas and Details, one of the three standards from Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, one of the three standards from Craft and Structure and the one standard from Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity. Three of the five participants discussed implementing an additional standard from Integration of Knowledge and Skills by having students analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic. Each participant discussed using Mini-Qs from The DBQ Project. The DBQ Project Mini-Q is a shorter version of the DBQ consisting of 3-7 documents, versus a regular DBQ that could have up to 26 documents. "Our Mini-Q lessons help students understand the process of close analysis, interrogation of documents, and argument writing. They are also highly scaffolded and may be adapted for students of all skill levels" (DBQ Project, 2015). The DBQ Project Mini-Q is a resource on the district's curriculum maps that teachers have access to online.

A detailed description of the specific types of instructional strategies participants reported using while implementing the CCSS is provided below and further summarized in the chart shown in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2: Reported ELA Standards for History/Social Studies Grades 6-8 Teachers use while Implementing the CCSS

Number of Participants	ELA History/Social Studies CCSS
5 of 5	Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.
5 of 5	Key Ideas and Details: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
5 of 5	Craft and Structure: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).
5 of 5	Integration and Knowledge: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.
5 of 5	Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.10 By the end of grade 8, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 6-8-text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Table 3: Reported Types of Instructional Strategies Teachers use while Implementing the CCSS

Number of Participants	Instructional Strategy
5 of 5	Analysis of Secondary and Primary Sources
5 of 5	Mini-Q- DBQ
1 of 5	Analysis Tool (APPARTS)
4 of 5	Guided Questions for Analysis
2 of 5	Categorizing/Bucketing Technique
2 of 5	Focus on Creating Thesis Statement
4 of 5	Analysis of Outside Text
3 of 5	Close Reading Technique

Nancy uses a number of strategies to help students develop ELA skills called for in the CCSS. She reported differentiating instruction by having her advanced classes read a novel, applying a structured document analysis protocol, and completing DBQs. For her regular level classes, however, she has her students analyze documents, pictures, and political cartoons.

In her Civics course, Nancy has her students read *The Giver*. She described how she supported Language Arts-based skills by having students examine the plot and analyze the characters within the story. Besides having students read the novel, Nancy discussed how the novel is related to Civics. Students were also given project choices that included writing another chapter of the book, writing a letter to the author, and creating a new society complete with a political system.

Nancy described how she has students in her advanced courses complete DBQs. The DBQ she described was from The DBQ Project Mini-Q: “How Did the Constitution Guard

Against Tyranny?” She first had students use APPARTS to analyze the primary and secondary documents within the DBQ. APPARTS is the acronym for Author, Place and Time, Prior Knowledge, Audience, Reason, Main Idea, and Significance. APPARTS is a tool that is used to assist students in examining, analyzing, and interpreting a document. She begins with guided practice where as a class they use APPARTS to analyze a document. Then students work in pairs and eventually on their own to analyze the remainder of the documents. Once students have analyzed the documents, they answer the main question in essay format. Students are supposed to use background knowledge on the topic and evidence presented in the documents to answer the DBQ. Nancy has students complete the DBQ in class so she can provide guidance along the way.

During the second interview, Nancy discussed how she differentiates instruction for her regular level courses. She explained that students in the regular level courses do not complete a full DBQ. Rather, they just practice analyzing documents, often with extended scaffolding. “Like a single activity will have the document or a picture, a political cartoon and there will be questions with it and like I said before, we’ll do it together as a class” (Nancy, personal communication, March 27,2015). Nancy added that some of the skills required within the CCSS take more time than she can allot in her basic education classes. She feels it takes longer to cover information with her regular level classes.

I found last year when we started, our PLC started trying incorporate the CCSS into our teaching, and we were trying to do lessons on primary and secondary sources because we wanted to work on the DBQs and the advanced classes seemed to pick up on it very quickly, but the basic classes...it was a nightmare. (Nancy, personal communication, March 27, 2015)

Nancy found it frustrating and challenging because she spent a lot of extra time teaching the writing activity associated with the DBQ. She stated it is important that all her students practice the skills associated with analyzing primary and secondary documents, but she does not deem it necessary to have her regular level students complete the essay portion of the DBQ because no writing is required on the EOC. “Analyzing the documents is something I feel is really important and also preparing them for the end-of-course exam, which at this point does not have a writing piece on it” (Nancy, personal communication, March 27, 2015).

Marie described a few different strategies she implements in her classroom to foster Language Arts-based skills found in the CCSS. She has students read a historical fictional piece, analyze topics from multiple perspectives, and has students complete DBQs.

Overall, Marie explained that she incorporates more reading and writing strategies into her daily instruction. Marie began by describing an instructional strategy used with her two gifted U.S. History classes. As a class, students read *Rip Van Winkle*, focusing on the concept of culture since they were studying American culture in the 1800s. Marie had students complete a triple Venn diagram – consisting of contemporary pop culture, culture of the 1800s, and the culture they read about in *Rip Van Winkle*. Students were able to learn about culture from various points of view as well as make comparisons to modern day culture. Marie thought it was important for her students to examine the story from a historical perspective and not a literary perspective. Marie explained she wanted to add a writing component to this exercise so she had students write out the information within the Venn diagram. “We read a story and I had them do a Venn diagram and then I have them write out their Venn diagram in sentences just so they can interpret different things” (Marie, personal communication, April 6, 2015).

During her second interview, Marie discussed that she has students complete a political

cartoon at least once a week. Additionally, she knows her students will need to analyze and interpret the meaning of political cartoons as well as historical documents on the EOC.

Marie described how she uses DBQs in her class to support Language Arts-based skills. Marie uses the Mini-Qs from The DBQ Project. She chooses specific DBQs based on particular topics she is covering in class. Before she begins teaching the DBQ, she starts with an “attention getter” to get students engaged in the topic. For this particular example, “Search and Seizure: Did the Government Go Too Far?,” Marie reported that she gave students a list of five situations and with a partner they had to decide if the government should be able to act without a warrant in each case. Then she gives necessary background information to students needed to analyze documents such as discussing the Fourth Amendment and the specific court case that the DBQ was questioning. Afterwards, Marie presents students with the documents. Instead of using an analyzing tool such as APPARTS Marie has students answer the individual questions that accompany each document within a DBQ. These questions are meant to help students understand each document. Marie’s students always analyze one document as a class, then individually, and then with a partner, and then as a class again. She provides scaffolding and multiple practice opportunities to her students prior to them analyzing documents individually. Marie expressed concern that students need to learn to work with one another to develop cooperative skills and learn to ask her for assistance while analyzing documents.

Marie has students complete an exercise called “bucketing.” Bucketing is a way for students to categorize or group the documents (put in “buckets”) within a DBQ. While grouping the documents, students should consider grouping by similar qualities and contents among each individual document. Then, Marie has students write a thesis statement for the DBQ. For this particular DBQ, Marie had them analyze the documents, bucket the documents, create their

thesis statement, and write an introductory paragraph. Marie mentioned that for the next DBQ, she would have her students write a complete essay.

Felicia uses a few strategies to support students while developing ELA skills within the CCSS. She used a technique called “close reading” to have her students carefully interpret a historical non-fictional story and complete DBQs. This is a strategy known as close reading, or a careful interpretation of a text achieved by multiple readings of a text, and through diligent attention to individual words. “Essentially, close reading means reading to uncover layers of meaning that lead to deep comprehension” (Boyles, 2012, p.37).

Felicia described an instructional strategy she used with the primary source, *The Story of Gilgamesh*, during a unit on Mesopotamia. First, she provided students with background information on Mesopotamia. Next, the class discussed the time period and the characters in the story, and then read an abridged version of *The Story of Gilgamesh*. The version used in class was adapted and designed to be appropriate for middle school students. Through the practice of close reading, students read and highlighted content they didn’t understand or had questions about. Then as a class, students discussed what they understood, and how the information from the story connected to their previous knowledge of Mesopotamia.

Based on what students discussed, Felicia proceeded to put students in small groups to try and understand any questions they previously had. Finally, they answered a few general questions about the story, but only after they had completely broken the story down and pulled it apart. Felicia used this strategy so students could discuss a time period from multiple perspectives using primary and secondary sources.

Felicia described how she had her students complete a DBQ on Mesopotamian society. She also retrieved a Mini-Q from The DBQ Project. For this particular DBQ, “Hammurabi’s

Code: Was it Just?” there were four documents. Students were put into groups and each group was given a document that they worked through together. Students did not use APPARTS or any other tool to help them analyze the document; rather, they answered questions given by Felicia such as: Is it a secondary or primary source? Could their source have bias or was it reliable? Who wrote it? If it’s a picture, does anything stand out? Once the class answered all the questions individually, students presented their answers to the class and then discussed each document and answered other questions that arose. Students recorded the information for each of the given documents.

Students used a graphic organizer for grouping, as well as comparing and contrasting documents. The purpose of this strategy was to help students group the documents in a manner that would assist them with their writing. For example, Documents A and D focus on the economy and Documents B and C focus on religion. From there, the students answered questions on how the two groups are similar or different. This was similar to Marie’s bucketing strategy. As a class they discussed the differences between a historical essay and a persuasive essay. Then, as a class they completed an outline explaining how to write a DBQ. Afterwards, students wrote the essay in class so Felicia could assist as needed. “They mostly wrote that in class, in school, so that we could kind of talk about what they were doing here, if they were stuck, things like that” (Felicia, personal communication, March 24, 2015).

Anshus uses different analyzing techniques such as, questioning, highlighting, and note taking, to help students develop ELA skills called for in the CCSS. Anshus differentiates instruction by having her advanced classes complete DBQs and her regular classes examine and analyze primary and secondary documents.

Anshus described in detail how she used the DBQ, “How Did the Constitution Guard Against Tyranny?” Anshus obtained this Mini-Q from The DBQ Project. She begins by providing students with background information about the topic and then goes through each document as a class. As a class students read through each document, highlighting key information that might be relevant to answering the main DBQ. Students also take notes on any relevant information that can assist in their writing. Students then answer the guiding questions that accompany each document. By the time they are ready to write, they have analyzed each document either as a class or with a partner. Anshus has her advanced students write the essay portion of the DBQ.

Like Nancy, Anshus discussed specifically how she differentiates for her regular level classes. Her basic education classes examine Black History primary sources and analyze each document using a set of questions that come with the documents. Using a photograph of a lunch counter protest during the Civil Rights Era, Anshus poses questions such as: Consider the expressions on the people’s faces and infer how they might have felt? Why were they there at the lunch counter? What goal do you think they were trying to achieve? Do you think they achieved their goal? How do you think the black students felt sitting at the only white lunch counter? Anshus facilitated some whole class discussion, but mainly students analyzed each document on their own. Students did not complete the DBQ. They merely analyzed primary and secondary sources by answering questions that accompanied each source. There were some higher order thinking questions that students had to complete such as: Place this incident [Woolworth’s Lunch Counter Sit-In, 1960] in the larger framework of the civil rights movement? Did it occur early or later in the movement? Did such forms of protest prove to be effective? However, students did write an essay based on the evidence they found in the documents.

Rusty uses a number of strategies to help students develop Language Arts-based skills called for in the CCSS. He has students analyze and interpret historical readings by using close reading strategies and having students complete DBQs.

Rusty explained how his students analyze current events like they do with other primary and secondary documents. Within the U.S History PLC, they pulled current event topics regularly which students would read. They examine aspects such as: Who wrote the article? Where is the article coming from? Is it a reputable source? Rusty has students analyze the current event as far as they can. He expects students to question everything and to not accept anything at face value.

Rusty shared that his students analyzed the *People's History in the United States* by Howard Zinn. As a class they read a few sections of Chapter Four, *Tyranny Is Tyranny*, reading individual paragraphs and broke down vocabulary for understanding, a component of close reading. Then students make a comparison of what was stated in the piece written by Howard Zinn and what they have learned in the textbook. Rusty expressed that he wants his students to constantly examine multiple perspectives. "Again, it is letting them see other sides of the story, the perspective depends on where you are standing in your life and the way you view it is shaped by your experiences" (Rusty, personal communication, March 30, 2015). Rusty ultimately had students create T-charts to interpret the similarities and differences of the different sources they had evaluated.

Finally, Rusty discussed how he uses DBQs in his classroom. He explained that the DBQ is the most commonly used strategy that fosters the skills within the CCSS and he has had students complete DBQs this year more than any other school year prior. Within the PLC, teachers use The DBQ Project Mini-Qs and find topics associated with their content. The

particular DBQ that Rusty discussed was “How Free Were Free Blacks in the North?” Like Marie and Felicia, Rusty begins with background information, stating that for students to effectively complete a DBQ they must have an adequate amount of background knowledge on the topic. Rusty went on to state that the DBQ is an instructional strategy that requires teachers to provide an ample amount of support for their students. “With the DBQ, again with something like this, I have found that you can’t just throw it at them and say why don’t you work on this for a few days” (Rusty, personal communication, March 30, 2015). As a class students complete an entire analysis of a document together, eventually analyzing the rest of the documents individually. He does not have students use a tool such as APPARTS to assist in analysis. However, he asks questions such as: What is the source? Does this appear to be a good source and how do we know? Are there additional notes to factor in accompanying the source? What does it say beyond what is listed here? How do the document analysis questions help us? Is this good evidence in the end? Will this information ultimately help us answer the question in the end? Students then answer the document analysis questions that accompany the documents within the DBQ. These questions are used to assist students in the analyzing process.

In the beginning of the year students create thesis statements together and then ultimately they write their own thesis. Finally, students answer the main question within the DBQ based on the evidence they have gathered from the individual documents.

Research Question 3: Do middle school social studies teachers feel adequately prepared to make decisions regarding the types of instructional strategies they choose to use to implement the CCSS in their classrooms?

As discussed in Chapter Two, both advocates and opponents of the CCSS assert that in order for teachers to be adequately prepared to teach the CCSS, professional development

opportunities, appropriate resources, and Professional Learning Communities (PLC) are crucial to the success of the CCSS. These components are not only vital for teachers to understand the standards, but also for them to know how to effectively implement the standards. Each participant had some level of exposure with the CCSS and each participant implemented the CCSS to some degree however two of the five participants stated they do not feel completely prepared to make decisions regarding the CCSS because they do not completely understand them. Nancy stated, “I feel like it is really the responsibility of the district and state to provide me with the training that I need and to know what I need so that I can implement them properly” (Nancy, personal communication, February 22, 2015). Further, four of the five participants stated they do not feel completely prepared to make decisions regarding the CCSS because they do not know how to fully implement them. Each participant implemented the CCSS to some degree in their classrooms but felt inadequate to completely and effectively do so due to the higher-level Language Arts-based skills associated with the CCSS. Factors such as insufficient teacher education and resources, and a limited amount of focus on the CCSS within their PLC created a sense among participants of not feeling adequately prepared to make complete decisions regarding the types of instructional strategies necessary to effectively implement CCSS in their classrooms.

A detailed description of the factors participants described for feeling inadequately prepared to make decisions regarding the instructional strategies they choose to use while implementing the CCSS is provided below and further summarized in the chart shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Reported Factors Participants Described for Feeling Inadequately Prepared to make Decisions Regarding the Instructional Strategies they Choose to use while Implementing the CCSS

Participants	Reported Factors
3 of 5	Insufficient Teacher Education
3 of 5	Limited Resources
3 of 5	Inconsistent Focus on CCSS within PLC

Insufficient Teacher Education and Resources

All participants stated that neither school nor district content-specific CCSS professional development for social studies teachers have occurred in 2013-2014 and also stated they have not been provided with appropriate resources to implement the CCSS. The one participant, Marie, who felt adequately trained had previously taught in a different county and had significant prior CCSS staff development. However, she also expressed concerns of wanting to be more informed on CCSS and believed content-specific professional development would assist in this.

Nancy recalled a staff development session she attended at Eastside provided by the district that introduced CCSS and focused on examining the standards for a better understanding of their meaning. Nancy believed this made her more aware of the CCSS's existence, but she felt this workshop did not accomplish much in terms of deepening her understanding of their content. Nancy added there have not been any other training or staff development workshops offered to help her implement the CCSS in her social studies class. The insufficient teacher education has added to her feelings of inadequacy of fully understanding and completely implementing the CCSS. She expressed feeling pressured to implement higher order thinking skills that she does

not feel adequately prepared to teach. Nancy voiced concern that there should be more subject-specific staff developments made available for teachers. She feels lost in the shuffle since social studies is rarely focused on when discussing the CCSS. Most of the teacher workshops offered concern Language Arts and math teachers. Nancy stated,

I feel like it is the responsibility of the district and the state to make sure that all teachers are informed and if it is something that they feel is worth the time, the effort, the money, the resources, and they want teachers to support it, then we need to know more about it so we can support it in the community. (Nancy, personal communication, February 22, 2015)

Nancy is aware there are resources available online, but no one has pointed her in the right direction, provided them for her, or showed her how to effectively implement them in the classroom. Last year she was provided with a laminated poster with the English Language Arts Standards for History/Social Studies Grade 6-8 that the teachers in her PLC used to review the standards. Besides that she cannot recall any other tangible resources that were given to her. Nancy expressed great concern that the state and district should provide teacher education that is focused specifically on the Language Arts/Social Studies CCSS, where resources would be distributed. She went on and stated, “I don’t think that is likely to happen, but it should to assist social studies teachers in properly implementing the CCSS” (Nancy, personal communication, February 2, 2015). Nancy feels that an increase in staff development would help. She suggests that several days of staff development where subject-specific resources would greatly help her confidence and ability to effectively implement the CCSS in her social studies classroom.

Marie was given the opportunity to receive professional development in the CCSS while previously employed in another county. She was part of a three-year professional development program to become an “expert” on CCSS in order to prepare teachers at her previous school. Marie completed the first year of the three-year program before moving to Eastside. In Marie’s previous county, once a month a teacher representative from every grade level and from every content area from all the schools attended a staff development on the CCSS. Within the sessions teachers analyzed the standards, discussed them, and then created practice lessons implementing the CCSS. The teacher representatives reported back to their school and shared what they learned with teachers from their grade level and content area. They were also provided with teacher education materials to share with their departments. She expressed that the workshops in her previous county was quite helpful and gave her a much better understanding of the CCSS. However, she believes additional professional development would be helpful for implementing the CCSS. When asked if she feels adequately prepared to implement the CCSS, Marie answered, “I started to, not completely; I am about half-way there. I can use it [the CCSS], but further training would be useful” (Marie, personal communication, February 9, 2015).

Marie also proclaimed that proper implementation of the CCSS should be addressed at all schools. Teachers should be guided as to how to properly implement them. Marie supported this by stating:

Although it is hard to get some veteran teachers on board with implementing something “new,” there is a chance CCSS will stick once teachers see the benefit. It took a really fun and informative training to make me realize that the CCSS are great. (Marie, personal communication, April 6, 2015)

Marie stated that she uses resources that were given to her from her previous county, but thus far she has not been provided with any new resources from Eastside or her current school district.

Felicia could not recall any school or district professional development workshops that have helped her understand or implement the CCSS. Felicia described that last year during faculty meetings, when they were first implementing the CCSS, teachers were shown district-created videos that incorporated the standards. However, she noted that the videos did not always seem appropriate for the audience: “ I recall math teachers in particular stating things like how that was for elementary school and we were middle school, and basically saying that they don’t think those strategies would work in middle school” (Felicia, personal communication, February 9, 2015). Felicia expressed concern that there needs to be more discussions regarding the implementation of the CCSS in middle school social studies classes.

Felicia stated that she was given the same laminated poster that Nancy discussed. Felicia also stated that she hasn’t received any additional resources from the state, district, or school regarding the CCSS. Felicia noted that being provided with more specific instructional strategies and content-specific resources to use would help her understanding of and ability to effectively implement the CCSS. “I think just more discussion or trainings or even just resources and strategies on what the Common Core looks like in the classroom will be helpful” (Felicia, personal communication, February 9, 2015).

Anshus stated she attended a session on the CCSS at the previous year’s annual conference of the Florida Council of the Social Studies (FCSS). When asked to elaborate, Anshus could not remember much more than that the standards were introduced to her. Anshus is the only participant in the study to have attended an FCSS conference. None of the participants

had ever attended National Council of the Social Studies (NCSS) conference. She stated that she had not attended any school or district staff development workshops that helped her understand or implement the CCSS. Anshus added that it would be helpful if staff developments were offered that explained the standards to help teachers realize that they may not be that far off from what they are already doing in the classroom.

If they [district trainers] are able to point out and say here is what we are really talking about, here is what that would look like and it's not that far from what you already do then there are a couple of things that could have been useful but again most of the Common Core stuff is mostly language arts. (Anshus, personal communication, February 12, 2015)

Anshus feels having more specific teacher workshops on how to use the CCSS in her classes will help her better understand and implement the CCSS in her social studies classroom.

Anshus stated that she knows there are CCSS resources available online and recalls receiving some resources last year but can't remember specifically what. "I would assume they are out there. It would be a matter of desire to find them and reason to either desire or force" (Anshus, personal communication, February 12, 2015). Further, Anshus feels it is up to the teacher to make the effort to find the proper resources to use.

Rusty couldn't recall any school or district staff development workshops that helped him understand or implement the CCSS. He described a few workshops that he attended that utilized Marzano terminology and PLC professional development where PLC leaders would learn how to facilitate meetings, but nothing specifically on the CCSS to assist social studies teachers in the understanding and implementation.

Rusty explained that he has not been provided with any resources to help him implement the CCSS. He added that the skills involved in the CCSS look very much like the skills within the DBQs and other instructional strategies he already uses. He stated that finding resources for these types of instructional strategies are very easy to access online. “From what I have seen from the Common Core stuff and some of the testing, that stuff involved what looks almost exactly like document-based questions and so those are easy to find, generally” (Rusty, personal communication, February 15, 2015).

Inconsistent Focus of PLC

Eastside School has Professional Learning Communities (PLC) designed to give teachers within the same grade level and content area 50 minutes each week for collaboration to take place. During this allotted time, teachers discuss best practices that can be used in their classrooms and create common assessments for the specific unit of study they are currently teaching. Each participant found this time quite valuable when there was a clear focus. Anshus summarized how most of the participants viewed the PLC: “I found that it was very helpful for teaching our content and very helpful for our grade level” (Anshus, personal communication, February 12, 2015).

During the 2013-2014 school year the focus was on the CCSS, “unpacking” the standards for understanding and discussing instructional strategies to effectively implement them. “Unpacking” is a term that is frequently used within PLCs, when describing analyzing them for a better understanding of their scope and what they entail. First, teachers would choose a standard that applied to a specific unit they were working on. Then as a group, teachers would unpack the standard into smaller components to get a better understanding of what the final intended student outcome was. Once there was an understanding of the standard, teachers would discuss how they

could implement that standard in their classroom. Instructional strategies were discussed and ultimately used to achieve the outcome of that standard. Then teachers would create a common assessment to insure that mastery of the standard could be evaluated.

During the 2014-2015 school year the focus of the Eastside PLC shifted away from the CCSS. A greater emphasis was put on teachers to create common assessments and scales that focused on the NGSSS rather than the CCSS. Scales are used for students to track their own learning progress. Participants reported that teachers were not informed of the shift and it was not explained why the change was taking place. The inconsistency and limited focus on CCSS led to four of the five participants feeling not being adequately prepared to make decisions regarding the CCSS. Rusty explained, “From a training sense, no we have not focused on it in over a year. But, I don’t think it’s a lack of training. I think that it is a lack of emphasis and focus” (Rusty, personal communication, February 15, 2015).

Since this was Marie’s first year at Eastside, she did not experience the PLC when the CCSS was the focus. However, she stated like all the other participants that if they were given PLC time to discuss the CCSS, it would greatly support teachers’ efforts in understanding and implementing the CCSS.

Nancy explained that during last year’s PLC teachers would look at the curriculum map that is provided by the district. A curriculum map is guide that identifies skills and content that should be taught throughout the school year. The curriculum map provided both the NGSSS and the CCSS. As they were planning lessons, teachers were able to look at the CCSS and discuss possible instructional strategies in which they could use to incorporate the standards. The teachers would find primary and secondary source documents that would fit with that topic and then discuss ways in which they could use them in class. “When we are planning lessons we can

also look at the CCSS and find a way to fit the writing and reading pieces in with what we are teaching along with the social studies concepts” (Nancy, personal communication, February 2, 2015). Nancy felt when her PLC was focused on the CCSS; it was very helpful to understanding and implementing them. Nancy further stated,

Oh yes, definitely, because if I don’t understand something maybe someone else does and some teachers may have more training on the Common Core standards than I do so in that situation they can be very helpful. So, definitely the professional learning community helps a great deal in learning more about them. (Nancy, personal communication, February 2, 2015)

Nancy stated that this year the focus of the PLC changed. This caused confusion within her PLC. Now the PLC’s main goal is to try to keep one another in the same place within the curriculum. There are two teachers new to the civics curriculum so the PLC provides a lot of guidance and support to them.

Another main goal of the PLC is to create common assessments based on the NGSSS. Teachers discuss questions that they feel might be on the EOC using sample questions from the test provided by the district. They create common assessments for all their students to take. Once students have taken the common assessments the teachers evaluated their scores and see if any remediation needs to take place. If remediation is needed, the PLC discussed instructional strategies that could be used to help students master those skills.

Nancy also expressed her concern that she doesn't feel they have enough time to plan within their PLC. In practice, Nancy reports that they meet in the PLC once a week for 40-50 minutes and periodically meet before and after school. Still, she feels that is not enough time to effectively plan nor discuss the implementation of the CCSS.

This was Marie's first year at Eastside so she had no previous experience with the PLC prior to this school year. She stated that within the PLC they met and talked about where they are in the curriculum and discussed strategies for how to teach specific topics within the civics curriculum. A main focus of the PLC is creating common assessments based on the NGSSS. Marie added there is no discussion of the CCSS within her PLC; the main concern is the NGSSS. Marie stated there is never enough time to plan individually. However, Marie feels that if more time were allotted within the PLC to discuss how to implement the CCSS, it would be extremely beneficial to her further understanding of the CCSS.

Marie would like to use the PLC time to discuss and break down the CCSS and discuss ways to implement and share resources stating, "Especially if we could work together as a group and accomplish the task probably a lot quicker and especially when other teachers know and can share resources I don't know" (Marie, personal communication, April 6, 2015).

Felicia described her specific PLC last year as significantly more focused on the CCSS compared to this school year. Last year within the U.S. History PLC, teachers would choose a CCSS that they felt would work well teaching a particular U.S history topic. From that point they would discuss instructional strategies that could be used to implement that standard, and then a common assessment was created. This is similar to Nancy's description of her PLC's activities.

Felicia explained that during her World History PLC this year, teachers created common assessments based on the NGSSS and created scales that are based on what students should know, understand, and do at the end of a unit. Like Marie, Felicia shared that there is never enough time to plan individually. Felicia proclaimed that the CCSS is an area that could be stressed more within the PLC stating, "I think this is an area where we could stress Common Core more, but we don't anymore" (Felicia, personal communication, February 9, 2015).

Anshus explained that the focus of the PLC this school year was very different from last year. Last year their focus was on the CCSS and they would begin by choosing a specific standard that aligned with the unit they were planning for. They would first “unpack” the standard. Anshus described unpacking the standards as “tearing them apart”, examining all parts, and then discussing how teachers could actually use them in the classroom. Anshus stated that she felt this was helpful in understanding the CCSS since once they unpacked the standards they would create a lesson plan to make sure they were implementing that standard. Anshus stated that the focus of the PLC has been inconsistent:

I think it depends on who you end up being in a PLC with and depends on how forced you are to do it and how much the people you happen to be with understand it and value it. I think the focus varies from subject to subject, grade level to grad level and content to content. (Anshus, personal communication, February 12, 2015).

During this school year 2014-2015 through the PLC teachers are there to support each another to make sure everyone is on the right track. They also create common assessments based on the NGSSS, again like Nancy described, to make sure all students are learning the information and, if they are not, how teachers can collectively identify instructional strategies to reteach the material.

Anshus stated that the problem is not being given enough time to plan but, rather, not having a clear focus on purpose: “If they had a clear focus and knew what they were supposed to be doing and how to do it” (Anshus, personal communication, February 12, 2015). For Anshus, the inconsistent focus on the CCSS has caused confusion. She proclaimed, “I personally am not really sure, not really clear and not really committed to exactly how much social studies needs to

and has to involve themselves with Common Core. I do not think that, that has been the red-hot front burner issue for us” (Anshus, personal communication, February 12, 2015).

Rusty recalled that during the 2013-2014 his PLC initially focused on “unpacking” the CCSS. He explained that unpacking essentially took the standards from a complicated, general sort of standard or statement, and attempted to figure out what those pieces looked like in practice. Afterwards, as a PLC, teachers would devise instructional strategies that were geared towards the CCSS.

Through the PLC they were also asked to create one common formative assessment every quarter. Rusty further explained that the PLC generally created similar tests with a common base of questions (approximately 20), but they allowed individual teachers to tailor the test to their own students.

Rusty declared that the focus within his World History PLC during the 2013-2014 school year quickly shifted. “At the end of the first semester the focus changed from the Common Core to a focus on unpacking Social Studies Standards which became kind of a strange thing because of the confalutedness of them” (Rusty, personal communication, February 15, 2015). The PLC was still asked to create scales and common assessments, but there was confusion in regards on what the focus was: the NGSSS or the CCSS. Once again Rusty explained that they had to alter the way scales were being used. Rusty explained further that the teachers were asked to create scales, although his PLC found the scales were not very helpful. So the PLC created ways for students to track their own progress, which they felt was more usable for a content-based curriculum.

Rusty did not feel that he was adequately prepared to effectively implement the CCSS not due to poor teacher education but, rather, due to an inconsistent focus and emphasis. He echoes

Anshus' observation that if the focus was there, he feels the hour a week the PLC meets would be sufficient. However the focus has not been on the CCSS, Rusty declared, "So I don't feel like that has been our focus. So, if that equates with training then we are a little, as my name suggests, rusty" (Rusty, personal communication, February 15, 2015). Rusty feels that the PLC was "on a good track" last year until they were told by a district supervisor to focus more on NGSSS. Rusty stated the PLC should be used to focus on the CCSS. This would help his understanding and ability to effectively implement the standards in his classroom. Rusty stressed that the district should focus on CCSS more, and since our conversations there has definitely been more of a focus on CCSS within his U.S. History PLC.

Research Question 4: What instructional successes do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS in their classrooms?

Most of the participants reported having some or little instructional success while implementing the CCSS, with one notable exception, who reported having great success. A major success participants reported experiencing when implementing the CCSS was an increase in student improvement, particularly in reading and writing skills. Participants explained that they have seen an improvement in their students' ability to analyze documents and utilize evidence from the documents in an affective manner. Participants also noted that their students' writing ability has improved. Participants declared that over the course of the 2014-2015 school year, their students improved in their reading and writing skills as seen in student work and they each expressed that they felt it was due to the increase of the skills within the CCSS that were implemented. For example, Marie described an experience with a document-based question activity she used in class which led to improved writing:

We went over every time what a thesis statement is and what should be in it and I had them write the intro paragraph, and that was it. Last one I did, which was about a month after this search and seizure one, I had them do the entire essay. To my surprise, most of them did do well. (Marie, personal communication, April 6, 2015).

A detailed description of the extent in which participants have felt successful while implementing the CCSS is provided below and further summarized in the chart shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Extent in which Participants have felt Successful while Implementing the CCSS

Number of Participants	Level of Extent
0 of 5	Very Great Extent
1 of 5	Great Extent
3 of 5	Some Extent
1 of 5	Little Extent
0 of 5	Very Little Extent

Nancy reported experiencing only a little success when implementing the CCSS. Even though she does provide some examples of how she has been successful, such as improvements in her students' ability to complete tasks associated with the CCSS and students' acceptance of the activities associated with the CCSS, she rated herself as having little success because the challenges she experienced outweighed her successes. When first asked this question Nancy immediately started sharing the challenges she has experienced such as: inadequate resources and staff developments, confusion in regards to what extent she is expected to implement the CCSS, and her lack of confidence in teaching the Language Arts- based skills within the CCSS.

However, Nancy described her students as becoming more receptive to reading from informational texts, analyzing documents, and comprehending what they have read out of a book or from a video, which she noted as a success. Nancy explained that the skills taught within the CCSS lend themselves to having students do different types of learning activities, further she explained, “It's a different vehicle and they are starting to understand that, and I believe it is helping me help them to be more successful” (Nancy, personal communication, March 27, 2015). Even though Nancy described the learning activities that can be utilized to implement the CCSS as a “different vehicle” later she also thought this was a challenge since many of the types of instructional strategies took longer to teach and “stifled” her creativity.

Overall, Nancy stated she has definitely seen improvements in her students’ ability to analyze documents. Further stating, students seem more confident when completing these types of assignments and her students do not complain as much as they used to.

Marie stated she has experienced some success when implementing the CCSS. She proclaimed the CCSS adds another element to teaching social studies. Instead of just lecturing or having students do projects, Marie believes the CCSS requires students to analyze, write, and “think outside the box”. She has seen improvements in her students’ analyzing and writing abilities. “Seeing their progress from day one to now and having them write the essay and not scratching up their paper so much, it’s pretty cool to see that” (Marie, personal communication, April 6, 2015). She exclaimed after working on this throughout the year, most of her students finally know what a thesis statement is and are able to write one with little to no assistance. “There are getting better, absolutely, they finally know what a thesis statement is!” (Marie, personal communication, April 6, 2015) Marie proclaimed this was a great achievement for her students.

Felicia exclaimed that she has experienced great success when implementing the CCSS. She went on and explained that she has seen improvements from her students in regards to analyzing primary and secondary source documents and using evidence from the documents to support their responses. She is impressed that students are disciplined enough to keep their opinions out and keep it factual, based on evidence from the documents. Felicia has also seen improvements in her students' overall ability in writing a historical essay.

The essays I get back where the kids are making a claim, and they're supporting that claim, but it's specifically with information from the documents, I think it's very easy for these kids to input their own opinions or just like outside information that they know about a topic, and so the fact that they're able to --- as 11 and 12 years olds --- be able to say, "I got it from here..." Like I said, most of them can do it. (Felicia, personal communication, March 24, 2015)

Anshus stated that she has experienced some success while implementing the CCSS. Anshus feels that exposing students to the skills within the CCSS holds value, "I think anytime we can expose them to writing is good and anytime we get them to look at the documents is also good, it's only going to improve their abilities to complete certain tasks" (Anshus, personal communication, April 2, 2015). She stated that increasing the amount of analysis and writing students are doing has been "positive" since she has seen improvements in their overall abilities. Anshus proceeded to state that it doesn't take her students as long to complete such tasks that used to take them much longer. "I have seen that students understand how to analyze documents quicker than before" (Anshus, personal communication, April 2, 2015).

Rusty echoed Marie and Anshus, and expressed that he has experienced some success when implementing the CCSS. He explained that it has been a work in progress since there was confusion about what teachers were supposed to be focusing on, that is, CCSS vs. NGSSS, and the inconsistent focus threw his PLC off last year. However, Rusty has seen an overall improvement in student growth in writing and stated this is where he has seen the most success. “I think recently I have gotten really good at it and I am really starting to see it pay dividends with students. Just seeing their writing grow, in seeing kids believe that they can write” (Rusty, personal communication, March 30, 2015).

Rusty expressed his excitement of seeing his students’ writing improve, an increased comfort level in writing, and their self-confidence in their own writing ability. He asks students to reflect on what they have learned about once or twice a quarter and he has gotten responses such as, “I was so scared of the word ‘essay’ but now I feel pretty confident when I see that word and I understand the structure and I understand how to create a better argument” and “I am better at citing to actual evidence and quotations and stuff”. A student reflection sample is provided (See Appendix I). Rusty shared that his students’ improvement motivates him to continue using these types of higher order thinking skills in his class.

Research Question 5: What instructional challenges do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS in their classrooms?

The challenges each participant reported to have experienced when implementing the CCSS varied. There was overall confusion regarding the CCSS caused by three factors: inconsistent focus of the PLC, inadequate communication at the school, state, and/or district level, and insufficient teacher education and resources provided. Felicia explained, “I think just

more resources and strategies on what Common Core looks like in the classroom would be helpful” (Felicia, personal communication, February 9, 2015).

Some participants reported just one of these factors as a challenge while others discussed more than one. A detailed description of the extent to which participants felt challenged when implementing the CCSS is provided below and further summarized in the chart shown in Table 6 and Table 7.

Table 6: Extent in which Participants felt Challenged while Implementing the CCSS

Number of Participants	Level of Extent
0 of 5	Very Great Extent
3 of 5	Great Extent
1 of 5	Some Extent
0 of 5	Little Extent
1 of 5	Very Little Extent

Table 7: Reported Challenges Teachers Experienced while Implementing the CCSS

Participants	Challenges
1 of 5	Inconsistent Focus of PLC
4 of 5	Inconsistent Focus on the CCSS at the State, District, and/or School level
4 of 5	Insufficient Teacher Education and/or Resources Provided

Nancy feels she has experienced great challenges when implementing the CCSS in her classroom. She was barely familiar with CCSS language when the state changed them to the Florida Standards. Nancy expressed that there has been much confusion about the expectations

for teachers and students. She noted that as a parent, she also sees how difficult the homework can be. “And I feel like this group that we have right now, this middle school group, and the group ahead of them, are suffering for it because they’re just so confused about what it is they’re expected to do” (Nancy, personal communications, March 27, 2015).

Nancy explained that due to the limited amount of resources provided and professional development that has been offered, she feels unsure to what extent she is expected to implement the CCSS. Nancy feels that the CCSS makes her feel unprepared. Additionally, she is not completely comfortable teaching some of the Language Arts skills associated with the CCSS.

I guess as a social studies teacher, I wouldn’t want the kids to go to a math class and the math teacher teach them something incorrect about civics. So, I feel very concerned when I take on teaching something like that, that I’m going to teach it wrong or go against what the language arts teacher prefers them to do or even confuse them. (Nancy, personal communication, March 27, 2015)

When asked what might help her understanding and implementation of the CCSS Nancy stated:

Well, number one, training --- and not 20 minutes in the morning before school. I believe that is something that needs several days of training and revisiting periodically throughout the year. And then also a little more clarification from administration and the district on how they want me to implement it in social studies and certainly some resources channeled to just my specific area would be beneficial. (Nancy, personal communication, February 2, 2015)

Marie feels she has experienced some challenges when implementing the CCSS. Marie doesn't feel she examines the standards enough to know if she is using them correctly, which she is hoping to improve on in the future. "I mean, I don't look at the Common Core Standards when I try to, that's probably been a challenge for me. I've used them, but did I really use them *right*?" (Marie, personal communication, April 6, 2015).

Marie expressed that she still has some confusion regarding the standards and this has been challenging for her. Marie would like to see more focus on the CCSS at the school level to increase her comfort and familiarity, while decreasing the little bit of confusion she still has. "I feel as though implementation of the CCSS needs to be addressed at school. Teachers should be guided as to how to properly implement them." (Marie, personal communication, April 6, 2015). Overall, Marie would like to see more CCSS-focused professional development and instructional resources provided by the district and/or the school.

Felicia explained she has experienced very few challenges when implementing the CCSS. Felicia stated the shortage content-specific resources and having students utilizing other documents besides texts to analyze has been difficult, especially finding pictures for her World History classes. She explained that many of the primary and secondary sources used in World History are difficult for her students to understand, so having access to more middle school material would be helpful.

The primary photos are so old that there's bias and things like that. So, I guess, kind of pulling in those things can be challenging with this content area specifically and trying to get kids to understand something that's difficult.

(Felicia, personal communication, March 24, 2015)

Anshus stated that she has experienced great challenges when implementing the CCSS. Anshus agrees that the writing skills within the CCSS are important to teach and good procedure. However, she proclaimed that as a social studies teacher, teaching and grading writing is challenging for her. When asked in what regards is writing challenging, Anshus explained:

Probably teaching and grading it. I really don't like to have to grade it, but I don't particularly care to teach them, you know, this is how you write a thesis and this is how you put this order and you know... Yeah, that's not really my thing. I am probably not as bad as I am saying, but I don't like it. (Anshus, personal communication, April 2, 2015)

When discussing whether to allow students to use notes while students write their document-based essays, Anshus said, "I don't know. I'm kind of torn. I'm not the greatest writer. That's not my strong point, but watching someone else teach would be helpful" (Anshus, personal communication, April 2, 2015). She expressed that more focus at the district and school levels in regards to the implementation of CCSS would ease her frustrations and increase her confidence level.

I think the hardest thing is always getting it [the CCSS] specific for social studies! It is hard to know how to apply it in our classes when it was not clear "what" was for social studies. So, more trainings on reading as it applies to social studies and maybe skill trainings specifically for social studies teachers would be helpful. (Anshus, personal communication, April 2, 2015)

Time constraints were another challenge for Anshus. She constantly feels pressured since there is so much content and so many higher order thinking skills that need to be addressed in such a short period of time in preparation for the EOC. Due to the time constraint and level of

skills needed to be taught, she is forced to have students complete fewer projects because they are more rigorous but not as fun. “So what I see that has gone to the wayside, things that have changed, I don’t see us doing as many projects, that yes they were tied to the curriculum, but maybe not quite as tightly” (Anshus, personal communication, April 2, 2015). Anshus expressed concern that computer labs are always booked due to different tests students are taking and when they are available. She expressed her frustration by noting, “It’s hard to schedule time for students to do things because the students aren’t particularly motivated to do work when they’re here” (Anshus, personal communication, April 2, 2015). She agrees with students feeling like school is a “jail cell”, further describing:

I don’t see us doing as many projects, maybe there was a little more fun in them, which I’m sorry is important because there’s a reason the kids think of this place as a jail cell. We take away all of their electives, because they have to be in remediation and we don’t go on field trips and we can’t do projects, well I would think it was torture. (Anshus, personal communication, April 2, 2015)

Rusty, like Nancy and Anshus, feels he has experienced great challenges when implementing the CCSS. Rusty explained that because there has been a limited focus and inconsistency within the school, district, and state levels, he has been challenged to a great extent. Rusty noted that the constant change of focus confuses and frustrates people.

I think there has been some real confusion as to what it is we are really trying to accomplish and I think people have a sense that we have been changing things every two years for so long, this is not going to be any different. So if this is it, I think people would appreciate just holding onto it for ten years to see if it is going to actually work. (Rusty, personal communication, March, 30, 2015)

Rusty added that their focus has been thrown off track for the past six to eight months due to the confusion and inconsistency within the PLC; “should we be focusing on NGSSS or CCSS?”

Rusty continued that once he first saw the first practice FSA writing test in January, “I came to the stark realization that my PLC wasn’t focused enough on our students’ needs in this area” (Rusty, personal communication, March 30, 2015). As a PLC they have since refocused their efforts on spending more time on the ELA social studies standards as they relate to their content, but they have not been told to do so at the school or district level.

Because of confusion of focus at the end of last year and starting into the beginning of this year, I think we kind of lost sight of this type of stuff and got lost in content land and realized skills, the skills are more important ultimately (Rusty, personal communication, March 30, 2015).

As a PLC they made the collective decision that focusing on the skills within the CCSS would be best for their students. Rusty concluded, “Now that we are focused as a PLC and I know myself now that I am focused as a teacher, I no longer feel that pressure [of the lack of focus]” (Rusty, personal communication, March 30, 2015).

Researcher Reflective Journal

As a practicing gifted social studies classroom teacher at Eastside, a PhD student in Curriculum and Instruction in Secondary Social Science Education, and having a prior relationship with four of five participants, it is vital that I reflected on the topics that were focused on within this research.

The reflective journal was critical in an instance such as when previous relationships had been established with the researcher; that is, I already had a working relationship with the participants. I have been working at Eastside for nine years and have worked with all but one

participant. Two of the five participants were in my Civics PLC during the 2013-2014 school year. We collaborated quite closely throughout the school year. I feel having a previous relationship with these participants gave them a chance to open up to me honestly throughout the interviews. However, I had to insure that each participant felt comfortable enough to open up to me. Prior to the start of the first interview as stated,

I wanted to make sure participants felt comfortable speaking with me. Prior to the interview I reminded them that I was not there to judge their understanding of the CCSS. I was merely there to try to understand how teachers are experiencing the new standards. (Researcher Reflective Journal, February 14, 2015)

Prior to the second interview, again I wanted to insure participants felt comfortable speaking with me,

Prior to the interview I reminded them that I was not there to judge their teaching practices in anyway. I was merely there to try to shed some light on a new mandate and how teachers may be responding to them. (Researcher Reflective Journal, March 7, 2015)

During Interview #1 participants were asked to discuss the Professional Learning Communities at Eastside during both 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years. As each participant explained how the focus shifted from year to year I too began to feel their frustration because I too couldn't understand why the focus shifted away from the CCSS in 2014-2015. As a researcher that worked at Eastside I completely understood their complaints of how the inconsistency within the PLC was a challenge in completely understanding and effectively implementing the CCSS.

As participants spoke about their frustrations of the shifts in the PLC I too became quite frustrated at the fact that the focus so quickly changes from year to year. I think the fact that I worked along side them and have been through much of what they are talking about, added to the fact that at times within the interview it was like we were having a conversation between two colleagues and not a scheduled interview for a research study. (Researcher Reflective Journal, February 14, 2015)

I also had to be cognizant of my own knowledge of the CCSS and the types of instructional practices I used and I had to ensure this would not influence any participants' responses given to me throughout the course of my research. I had to be careful not to be judgmental towards the instructional practices that participants reported using in their classrooms.

I had to remember not to judge them on their teaching practices. I had to keep reminding myself that the experiences I have had with the CCSS varied greatly from those of the five participants which lead me to have a greater understanding of them and a higher comfort level to implement them in my classroom.

(Researcher Reflective Journal, March 7, 2015)

My deep understanding of the CCSS has been shaped by three key factors. First, my role as the Civics Professional Learning Community (PLC) Leader for the past three years has exposed me to the CCSS at an increased level when compared to the five participants in this study. As a PLC leader in the summer of 2013 I was given the opportunity to attend a two-day district training that focused on how to effectively facilitate a PLC meeting and a two-day training that focused on Marzano's Instructional Framework (Marzano, 2007). It was determined that during the 2013-2014 school year in the PLC we would focus on the CCSS. During the two-

day district training we discussed ways to unpack the standards as well as discussed other components of the PLC such as allotting time to share best practices. The training was for PLC Leaders across all content areas so there was nothing content-specific provided to teachers. However, I felt this training was valuable and I was confident to share what I learned with my PLC once school started in the fall. During Marzano's training I learned about what comprised the CCSS and how different they were from the NGSSS (see Appendix A). The NGSSS is what social studies teachers were used to. Again, I was not given any content-specific resources to assist with the implementation of the CCSS but I was provided with information about the upcoming changes that were going to take place. The changes discussed included a more rigorous set of standards that teachers were going to have to implement within the next school year.

As teachers were telling me about how they at times felt inadequately prepared to fully understand and implement the CCSS I realized that all teachers should have been given the opportunity to attend the Marzano training. Much of what he talks about is aligned with the CCSS. The training was offered to all teachers but PLC Leaders from Eastside were chosen to go and the cost of the conference was taken care of. If my administration hadn't told me about the training I would not have known about it. (Researcher Reflective Journal, February 14, 2015)

After both trainings I definitely felt more comfortable understanding the standards through the unpacking process and the changes that were going to take place.

The second factor that deepened my understanding of the CCSS was being a graduate student and completing a literature review focusing on the standards. This scholarly inquiry was also a point of reflection in the Researcher's Reflective Journal. Writing my literature review

deepened my understanding and knowledge of the standards. First and foremost I was made aware that the CCSS name had changed to the Florida Standards. Through the literature review I had acquired a solid understanding of the differences between the NGSSS and the CCSS.

I was exposed to what the CCSS should look like in the classroom since many examples were provided in regards to the types of instructional strategies that should be used while implementing the standards. I was also exposed to the viewpoints of what the advocates and opponents had to say regarding the CCSS. I honestly felt like I was at such an advantage over other teachers due to the information I learned while writing my literature review.

As the two participants explained to me that they didn't feel confident teaching the CCSS within their social studies classes something went off in my brain that made me understand that teachers were never fully given the opportunity to examine the differences between the NGSSS and the CCSS. If they were given more support and more time to do so maybe they too would feel more confident teaching skills that were expected of them. (Researcher Reflective Journal, February 23,2015)

Further, the understanding and knowledge that I had in regards to the CCSS, all teachers should have had access to. I shared many of these aspects with my PLC during the 2013-2014 school year and currently still do.

The third factor that deepened my understanding and knowledge of the CCSS is my attendance at national and state social studies conferences. A requirement of my PhD program was to attend and present at national and regional professional conferences. I chose to present my work at both the National Council of the Social Studies (NCSS) and the Florida Council of the Social Studies (FCSS). Through the sessions I have attended at the NCSS annual conference,

I understand the connection and understand how the CCSS can be used within social studies classes. For the past two years many of the sessions at both the state and national social studies conferences have been heavily focused on the CCSS; in turn, these have influenced my thinking.

Only one participant mentioned to me that they have attended a State social studies conference and none of them have attended a National social studies conference. This was surprising to me at first but then I thought if it weren't for my program within graduate school encouraging us to attend and present would I have attended? (Researcher Reflective Journal, February 23, 2015)

The fourth and final factor that made it easier for me to understand the complexities of the standards was that I have been a gifted social studies teacher for many years and several of the skills within the CCSS I have already been implementing in my classes. I definitely had to work a little harder implementing some of them more than others but I learned a lot of these strategies at an Advanced Placement training I took some years ago.

As teachers were sharing their complaints of not always feeling adequately prepared to fully implement the CCSS I thought about how much harder it would have been for me to implement them if I had not taught gifted for so many years and if I had not attended that AP social studies training years ago. All teachers should be given the same opportunity to learn about instructional strategies that foster high levels of learning to their students. (Researcher Reflective Journal, February 23, 2015)

I learned strategies such as: analyzing primary and secondary sources, having students write from multiple perspectives, and having students read historical and informational texts.

As a whole, the Researcher's Reflective Journal was helpful in understanding my role as a researcher since I had previous relationships with four out of five of the participants. The journal also made me cognizant of my personal understanding of the CCSS. I had to examine my own experiences with the CCSS and not judge my participants' views on the CCSS as well as the types of instructional strategies they chose to use when implementing them due to their own personal experiences.

Conclusion

In this chapter, teachers' points of view were analyzed and reported by examining their responses to each of the five research questions. Overall, many similar themes emerged among each of the participants. Factors such as teachers' feelings regarding the CCSS, the connection between standardized tests and the CCSS, and teachers believing the skills within the CCSS are best practices all influenced participants' decisions to implement the CCSS in their daily instruction. Each participant stated that she or he has not made any major instructional changes since the implementation of the CCSS, but each also noted that there has been an increase in the application of higher order thinking skills in her or his classroom.

The main types of instructional strategies that participants reported using while implementing the CCSS included having their students analyze numerous primary and secondary sources, including texts, charts, graphs, and political cartoons. Each participant discussed how she or he uses DBQs in their classes because of the many CCSS that are achieved when completing a DBQ. For example, as part of a DBQ assignment, students analyze primary and secondary sources by evaluating aspects such as the author's purpose, the intended audience, the source's reliability, and if bias was present. Students also have to interpret the information they discovered to answer guided questions, determine the relationship among the documents, and

ultimately write an essay, including a thesis statement, supporting their argument using the evidence they collected.

Participants explained that even though they implemented the CCSS to some degree in their classes, at times they feel inadequately prepared to fully make decisions in regards to the types of instructional strategies they chose to use to implement. Factors such as insufficient teacher education and instructional resources specifically geared towards the Language Arts/Social Studies CCSS, and an inconsistent focus on the CCSS through the PLC have caused this feeling of inadequacy. Participants expressed that more staff development opportunities, curricular and instructional resources, and earmarking time within their PLCs to focus on the CCSS would be beneficial to helping them feel adequately prepared to make decisions regarding the types of instructional strategies they use in their classrooms.

Overall, all five participants stated that student improvement in reading and/or writing skills has been their greatest success while implementing the CCSS. All participants stated that their greatest challenge while implementing the CCSS has been an overall confusion about the CCSS. Participants identified the following factors as having caused this confusion: inconsistent focus of the PLC, inconsistent focus at the state, district, and/ or school level, and/or insufficient Language Arts/Social Studies CCSS professional development.

In Chapter 5, there will be discussion of the research findings of this study and how they connect to the extant literature in the field. Some possible interpretations and implications of this research will be presented, as well as recommendations for Social Social Studies Education practice and future research.

CHAPTER 5:

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how the implementation of the recently adopted Common Core State Standards (CCSS) might affect the instructional decision-making of middle school social studies teachers in one district in Florida. Further, this study investigated how the CCSS might affect a teacher's curricular and instructional gatekeeping role. Also examined were the successes and/or challenges teachers have experienced while implementing the CCSS. Since the CCSS are such a new initiative, adopted in 2010 and fully implemented in 2014, there is limited research on the instructional practices being used to support the needs of middle school social studies teachers implementing these new standards in their classrooms. This study attempted to close the gaps within the research, by contributing to the literature in the area of social studies education and the types of instructional strategies social studies teachers may use to achieve the goals within the CCSS. Also, knowledge was added to previous research on the role of the teacher as a curricular and instructional gatekeeper.

This chapter includes a discussion of the research findings and a discussion connecting the research findings to the literature review in Chapter 2 through an analysis of the five research questions. The interpretations and implications of this research are also included, as well as recommendations for future research.

Summary of Study

This study was a qualitative case study involving five participants where two open-ended, semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. A qualitative case study was used to examine how the implementation of the recently adopted CCSS may have affected the instructional decision-making of middle school social studies teachers and to what extent the CCSS affects middle social studies teachers' curricular and instructional gatekeeping roles. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants that were middle school social studies teachers who have been teaching at least two years, one year in which the CCSS were not mandated and one year in which they were. The sampling was also one of convenience since each participant was chosen from the school in which I (the researcher) currently teach, Eastside Middle. Using participants from one school rather than several schools decreased the amount of variance among the participants. The qualitative data collected were analyzed to answer the following five research questions guiding this study:

- 1) To what extent does the CCSS influence the middle school social studies teachers' decision-making in the types of instructional strategies they choose to use in their classrooms?
- 2) What specific types of instructional strategies do middle school social studies teachers report to use when implementing the CCSS?
- 3) To what extent do middle school social studies teachers feel adequately prepared to make decisions regarding the types of instructional strategies they choose to use to implement the CCSS in their classrooms?

- 4) What instructional successes do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS in their classrooms?
- 5) What instructional challenges do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS into their classrooms?

Initially, a recruiting invitation email (Appendix C) explaining the study was sent out to seven potential participants that met the specific criteria for this study, namely, that they teach social studies at the middle school level with a minimum of two years of teaching experience, one with and one without the CCSS mandate. The first five participants who responded were chosen to be in this study. Immediately after receiving signed participant agreements, the first round of open-ended, semi-structured interviews were scheduled. All five teachers signed an IRB informed consent form (Appendix E) and chose a pseudonym to use prior to the first interview.

Two open-ended, semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. The first face-to-face open-ended, semi-structured interview lasted between 30 to 35 minutes and the second interview lasted between 40 to 45 minutes. After each interview the digital recordings were sent to a professional transcriber where a written record was produced. To increase accuracy and validity, after each interview was transcribed, participants reviewed their transcripts for any corrections and clarifications that needed to be made or any additions that needed to be added. For both interviews, participants confirmed that their transcripts accurately depicted their thoughts and beliefs. Since a professional transcriber provided a written record, to provide a deeper submersion into the data during the analysis, I listened to the digital recordings numerous times as well as analyzed the written transcriptions.

As previously mentioned in Chapter 4 due to the nature of qualitative research, research question # 2 changed throughout the course of this study. Originally it stated, what specific types of instructional strategies do middle school social studies teachers plan to use when implementing the CCSS? Once the data was collected and analyzed it was determined “plan to use” should be modified to “report to use”. Originally, “plan to use” was used since direct observations were not conducted and I was relying on self-reported data. However, throughout the analysis it was determined for clarity purposes “report to use” was a better choice. Teachers reported the types of instructional strategies they used to implement the CCSS in their classrooms not the types of instructional strategies they planned to use in their classrooms.

Discussion of Results

The major findings of this study were primarily gleaned from Research Questions #1, #2, and #3. Research Question #1 investigated how the CCSS influenced middle school social studies teachers’ decision-making in the types of instructional strategies they choose to use and ultimately how this might have affected their role as an instructional gatekeeper. Research Question #2 focused on identifying the types of instructional strategies middle school social studies teachers reported using when implementing the CCSS. Research Question #3 explored the extent to which middle school social studies teachers felt adequately prepared to make decisions regarding the types of instructional strategies they choose to use to implement the CCSS in their classrooms. Research Questions #5 focused on any challenges teachers may have experienced when implementing the CCSS in their classrooms. Many of the challenges reported in Research Question #5 were also major reasons for participants feeling inadequately prepared as per Research Question #3. Research Question #4 focused on any successes teachers may have experienced while implementing the CCSS.

Analysis of Research Question 1: To what extent does the CCSS influence middle school social teachers' decision-making in the types of instructional strategies they choose to use in the classroom?

Many factors were discussed within the literature that might affect a teacher's role as a curricular and instructional gatekeeper such as teacher beliefs, availability of resources, and the state and national standards. Thornton (2005) states that educators may tend the gate consciously or unconsciously, but their gatekeeping is inevitable. There are many factors that teachers consider when deciding what instructional practices they will choose to use in their classroom. For example, teachers examine the curriculum, state standards, and the reading and writing levels of the students in their classes. This is because teachers have to think about the specific types of learners in their classes, ESOL and ESE included. Further, over time, teachers get to know their students individually and figure out how they learn best. Teachers also have to think about high stakes standardized tests that students have to take. Other factors such as teacher beliefs about schooling, organizational influences such as groups of people teachers interact with, and the contexts in which teachers work can influence their decision-making.

It was determined among the participants that the CCSS did have an influence on their decision-making regarding the types of instructional strategies they chose to use in their classroom. Three major factors that proved to influence their instructional decision-making to implement the CCSS in their classrooms were: teachers' personal beliefs towards the CCSS, student assessment- the connection between standardized tests and the CCSS, and that teachers feel the skills within the CCSS are best practices that social studies teachers should use in their classrooms. Ultimately, within this study, these three factors affected each teacher's role as a curricular and instructional gatekeeper. Thornton (1994) discusses what teachers believe and

their decisions concerning planning, instructional strategy, and assessment of student learning are the main determinants of what students take away from the classroom. Thornton's point is evident within this research; teachers' beliefs and their decisions regarding the instructional strategies they chose to use, were contributing factors to what students were exposed to in their classrooms.

Beliefs that Influence Teachers' Decision-Making

Each participant had both positive and negative beliefs toward the CCSS. Shaver (1979) discusses that a teacher's belief about schooling, his or her knowledge of a given subject area, and of available materials and techniques, affects the daily experiences in the classroom. This connection between teachers' beliefs and their classroom experience were evident in the data. Each participant had both positive and negative beliefs toward the CCSS that influenced his or her decision-making in the extent in which they implemented these standards, as well as his or her curricular and instructional gatekeeping role.

Positive feelings about standards can affect a teacher's gatekeeping role, as well as having a high level of confidence to implement the necessary standards. Each participant exhibited positive beliefs towards the CCSS such as expressing that the CCSS were skills that students needed to know and master. Participants indicated that having a common set of skill-based standards that all students were to achieve, no matter where they lived, would be beneficial to both student and teacher. Each participant seemed to realize the value in this. Three out of five participants had a high level of confidence when discussing the CCSS. Some participants exhibited a higher level of confidence with teaching CCSS skills. Rusty, Marie, and Felicia, all having a high level of confidence, stated they were more likely to use the CSSS in their classrooms. Marie and Rusty thought that the CCSS gave them more opportunities to use other

instructional strategies to use in their classrooms. Advocates of the CCSS state that the standards leave plenty of room for teacher creativity and teacher decision-making in the types of instructional strategies used since the standards do not specify *how* to teach but, rather, *what* needs to be taught. Ohler (2013), for example, points out that the Common Core initiative leaves choices about methodology to teacher practitioners.

Participants also shared negative beliefs they held towards the CCSS. Nancy and Anshus, for example, expressed a lack of confidence regarding how to effectively implement the CCSS in their classrooms. They indicated that this lack of confidence was rooted in insufficient teacher education about the standards. They felt inadequately prepared to teach many of the higher order Language Arts skills associated with the standards. Participants who exhibited a lack of confidence towards teaching some of the CCSS skills did not feel comfortable teaching them in their classrooms. This research finding is in keeping with Ross (2006), who states that the most effective means of improving curriculum is to improve the professional development given to teachers; teachers need to be better prepared to exercise their curricular decision-making responsibilities that are a crucial part of instructional practice.

Additionally, Nancy and Anshus felt the CCSS stifled their creativity. This sentiment caused them to not use the types of strategies associated with the CCSS. Since many of the skills associated with the CCSS take more time to execute when compared to skills associated with the NGSSS. Less time was left to have students complete less rigorous but more “fun” projects. Opponents fear that the CCSS might stifle a teacher’s creativity when choosing instructional strategies to use and teachers will soon teach the same regardless of the student populations within their classrooms.

The positive and negative beliefs towards the CCSS that participants reported influenced their decision-making in the types of instructional strategies they chose to use in the classroom, which in turn affected their role as a curricular-instructional gatekeeper. This added to the existing research that supports the notion that teacher beliefs have an impact on their decision-making in the classroom.

Standardized Tests and the Implementation of the CCSS

Grant (2007) notes that proponents and critics of testing typically assume that tests drive the entirety of teaching, although a number of questions remain open. The emerging research base suggests that state tests influence teachers' decisions regarding content, instruction, and assessment differently. Participants in this study stated they were aware that the skills tested on the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) and the state End-of-Course (EOC) examinations are the types of skills associated with the CCSS. The social studies teachers stated that they feel they play a role in supporting the Language Arts teachers by choosing instructional strategies that will help students master the language and thinking skills needed to be successful on these assessments. Knowing that these skills were tested, participants consciously chose instructional strategies that promoted higher order Language Arts-based skills such as analyzing, interpreting, and pulling out evidence from charts, graphs, and/or primary and secondary sources.

The principal pedagogical effect of state social studies tests appears to be on teachers' content decisions. Grant (2007) explains that teachers report making a range of small to large changes in the subject matter ideas they teach. Although state tests do not mandate how teachers should teach, these mandates do suggest what should be taught. Grant (2007) further explains that teachers modify their curriculum in reaction to standardized exams, which makes sense given that state curriculum and assessment policies focus on content. Social studies EOC

assessments do focus on content however many of the items on the Civics EOC require students to analyze and perform higher order thinking tasks to answer content based questions. Not only are teachers teaching specific content but they are also teaching specific skills.

While social studies educators prepare students for the FSA, they are teaching Language Arts-based skills through the specific content. For example, a teacher can have a student analyze the Declaration of Independence, with a series of higher order thinking questions, to explore the meaning of the document. Vogler and Virtue (2007) state that teachers need to trust their professional training and pedagogical knowledge to guide their instruction decisions, “otherwise, the study of social studies will become nothing more than the ability to regurgitate a collection of facts listed in a state-mandated curriculum framework” (p.57). Teachers need to choose instructional strategies that will deepen their students’ knowledge behind rote memorization. Being cognizant that the skills associated with the CCSS are connected to the FSA and the EOC influenced participants’ decision-making and their curricular and instructional gatekeeping role. Participants consciously chose instructional strategies that they felt were going to support Language Arts teachers and the skills students needed to know to do well on state assessments.

CCSS are Best Practices

Participants proclaimed that the skills within the CCSS are best practices that social studies teachers should use in their classrooms; best practices they already try to implement in their classrooms. Instructional practices such as: analyzing primary and secondary sources, interpreting multiple sources, and using evidence from documents to answer a DBQ were all identified by the study participants as CCSS skills that are also useful strategies in social studies instruction. Most of the instructional strategies participants discussed using in their classes were connected to the CCSS. Participants stated that they at times implemented the CCSS in their

classrooms due to many of them being best practices. However, all participants admitted they were interested in learning more instructional strategies they could use to fully implement the CCSS in their classrooms. Further, expressing their desire for content-specific professional development that would assist in choosing strategies connected to the high level skills associated with the CCSS.

When discussing the types of instructional strategies participants reported using within their classroom, the strategies they shared were best practices within the field of social studies education. Participants provided examples such as: providing background knowledge prior to having students analyze documents, highlighting important information within the text, using close reading, and having students create thesis statements. Brooks and Dietz (2012) argue that excellent teachers will continue to engage in the practices that the CCSS endorse: balancing informational and narrative texts, helping students build knowledge within the disciplines, scaffolding complexity of text material, supporting students' abilities to offer evidence in defending an argument, and building academic vocabulary. Believing that the CCSS are best practices that social studies teachers should already be using in their classrooms influenced each participant's instructional decision-making and role as an instructional gatekeeper.

Overall Impact of CCSS on Teachers' Decision-Making

Overall, each participant felt he or she did not make any major instructional changes since the mandated implementation of the CCSS, but each participant described an increase in the overall consciousness of the types of instructional strategies he or she reported using in response to the CCSS. They all stated that they have increased the use of the types of instructional strategies associated with the CCSS. All participants explained that they incorporated an increased number of higher order reading and writing strategies such as

analyzing and interpreting primary and secondary sources and having students complete Document-Based Questions (DBQs). At times within the research teachers' statements seems contradictory, sometimes it seemed like the CCSS had a great impact, other times, not much impact. This is due to their ongoing discussions and reflections as per the research study itself. Furthermore, the CCSS had a fair bit of an impact on teachers' decision-making, the standards influenced the types of instructional strategies they chose to use in their classrooms and ultimately affected their role as a curricula and instructional gatekeeper.

Analysis of Research Question 2: What specific types of instructional strategies do middle school social studies teachers report to use when implementing the CCSS?

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are an attempt to prepare students to compete and succeed in a global market and to be college- and/or career ready. Kist (2013) describes how the CCSS recognizes that to thrive in the technologically wired, world students need to master new ways of reading and writing. With the adoption of the CCSS, almost all states within our country will fully implement a new set of standards within their education system. To assure that all students are receiving the same high level of education, the standards are much more literacy-based and complex than many of the current states' standards teachers are using. Alberti (2012) discusses that the standards focus on text complexity because the ability to comprehend complex texts is the most significant factor differentiating college-ready from non-college-ready readers.

However, questions remain concerning how CCSS curriculum standards will be put into practice: As the literature suggests, the implementation of the CCSS will be the most challenging. The changes brought forth by the CCSS, such as a heavy focus on Language Arts-based skills, is expected to impact the ways social studies teachers approach curriculum and instruction. As seen in the research findings all the participants expressed that they play an active

role supporting Language Arts teachers in preparing students for the FSA. Further, each explaining that he or she implements more Language Arts-based skills in their classrooms.

While all participants explained the types of instructional strategies they used when implementing the CCSS, it became evident that they were implementing quite a few of the standards without specifically stating they were doing so. For example, when Felicia described her use of analyzing *The Story of Gilgamesh*, she did not see the apparent connection to the CCSS, but it was clearly evident. She described the process of how she had students analyze the outside reading source but was unaware she was using the strategy of close reading. Similarly, Rusty outlined his use of having students use a variety of sources to expose students to multiple perspectives of controversial topics, another strategy present in the CCSS. Often times within our discussion, participants would discuss skills associated with the CCSS, but did not explicitly use the term used in the CCSS.

Participants described having students analyze primary and secondary sources such as: charts, graphs, pictures, historical documents, and political cartoons. They also had students complete a DBQ. These were all used as prime examples of the types of instructional strategies they reported using in their classroom when implementing the CCSS. Participants explained that they used specific types of instructional strategies while teaching students how to analyze primary and secondary sources. Some of the instructional strategies discussed were: providing background knowledge to students prior to viewing documents, using APPARTS or providing specific questions for students to use while analyzing a document, highlighting important information within a document, answering guided questions that accompany the documents, and using “bucketing” techniques to categorize main ideas and other significant points within a document. For example, Marie and Felicia both described “bucketing” techniques they used to

help students categorize themes when working through documents, in doing so it helps students make meaning of each document. Anshus described how she has students highlight pertinent information within a document that they feel will be useful when answering the DBQ.

A DBQ encompasses more than merely analyzing primary and secondary sources; once the document is analyzed for author's point of view, bias, accuracy, etc. the information has to be interpreted to make sense of all the information. Once students determine the meanings of each document they have to answer the DBQ in essay format, using evidence from the documents to support their arguments. Participants described in great length how they utilized DBQs within their classroom. Each participant used Mini-Qs from The DBQ Project. Nancy, for example, discussed how she used the "How Did the Constitution Guard Against Tyranny?" DBQ with her students. She had her students use APPARTS to analyze the primary and secondary documents within the DBQ. APPARTS is the acronym for Author, Place and Time, Prior Knowledge, Audience, Reason, Main Idea, and Significance and is a tool that is used to assist students in examining, analyzing, and interpreting a document. She further explained that she used guided practice along the way and eventually students would answer the DBQ.

The DBQ essay is supposed to have a clear and concise thesis statement as well as an introductory paragraph, topic paragraphs, and a conclusion. Marie and Rusty both specifically mentioned focusing on having their students write cohesive thesis statements with their students. Both felt that this was an important skill for their students to master.

The CCSS focus on argumentative writing versus the expository writing that many state standards focus on. Davis (2012) explains that the CCSS favors argumentative writing over persuasive writing because it requires more logic and reason, and is more in line with the kind of writing that students will be expected to do in college. Davis (2012) goes on to state that

argument writing consists of thesis/claim, evidence, and appeals to logic and reason, whereas persuasion writing appeals to the audience's emotion.

The standards focusing on evidence-based writing and speaking to inform and persuade is a significant shift from current typical practice today. Tobin (2014) points out that students will be expected to write more frequently and at higher levels and they will need to support their thinking with evidence and factual information obtained from texts provided.

Each participant in this study utilized historical and argumentative writing in the classroom. Nancy made the point to discuss that this was a clear shift she has seen from the state's previous FCAT writing assessments. Previously, students would have an expository piece of writing rather than argumentative writing where they were required to use evidence from the text. Each participant described implementing the DBQ where students complete historical essays and argumentative writing pieces. Students complete a DBQ, once the documents have been analyzed, interpreted, and categorized students use evidence from the documents to write an essay based on the original question. Students must utilize useful evidence collected within the documents and their prior knowledge to defend their response.

Lamb and Johnson (2013) explain how rather than simply reading historical documents, the CCSS involves students in deep-thinking activities such as making comparisons among different perspectives, using passages as evidence to support arguments, and drawing conclusions based on multiple perspectives. Rusty, Felicia, and Marie reported engaging their students in these activities. Each provided students with outside historical reading resources to examine and analyze to make comparisons with what they already learned about a specific topic. Marie, for example, had students read *Rip Van Winkle* as a class, focusing on the concept of culture since they were studying American culture in the 1800s. Marie had students complete a

triple Venn diagram – consisting of contemporary pop culture, culture of the 1800s, and the culture they read about in *Rip Van Winkle*. Students were able to learn about culture from various points of view as well as make comparisons to modern day culture.

Beach et al. (2012) state that a primary focus of the CCSS is developing the ability to read informational texts employed in social studies classes by applying social studies analysis. The CCSS heavily focuses on being able to analyze texts, nonfiction, and informational pieces. Alberti (2012) explains that in middle and high school, nonfiction texts are a powerful vehicle for learning content as students build skills in the careful reading of a variety of texts, such as primary documents in a social studies class. Four out of five participants described using instructional strategies that supported standards by having students read outside informational texts. For example, Anshus discussed having her classes examine Black History primary sources and analyzed each of the documents highlighting any information that could be used later to answer critical thinking questions. There was higher order thinking questions that students had to complete such as: Place this incident [Woolworth's Lunch Counter Sit-In, 1960] in the larger framework of the civil rights movement? Did it occur early or later in the movement? Did such forms of protest prove to be effective?

Teachers should expose students to a plethora of reading material as well as non-fiction texts and teach how to detect credibility and bias within the text. Three out of five participants specifically mentioned having students use information from multiple readings to make comparisons with the information they already acquired. Rusty, for example, described how he had students analyze the *People's History in the United States* by Howard Zinn. By reading individual paragraphs and breaking down vocabulary words, students made a comparison of what was stated in the piece written by Howard Zinn and what they had learned in the textbook.

Rusty ultimately had students create T-charts to interpret the similarities and differences of the different sources they had evaluated.

Furthermore, the participants had students explore multiple perspectives about a single topic. Davis (2012) states that in order to address the CCSS, teachers can increase the level academic rigor of content in their classrooms by using multiple sources of information which will also assist in students seeing a variety of perspectives and help students adjust to texts at varying levels of difficulty.

Another strategy that is frequently discussed throughout the literature is a strategy known as close reading, or “the ability to read texts closely---to be text detectives” (Kist, 2013, p.39). Boyles (2012) explains that although students need to read longer texts, teachers should not abandon shorter texts, in order to expose students to a wide range of reading levels to practice close reading. Three out of five participants described using close reading where students examine a text and study the words and sentence structure to determine meaning. Felicia, for example, described how she has students closely read *The Story of Gilgamesh*, deconstructing the text and identifying intent, significance, and how the information from the story connected to their previous knowledge of Mesopotamia. Through the practice of close reading, students read and highlighted content they didn’t understand or had questions about.

Analysis Research Question 3: Do middle schools social studies teachers feel adequately prepared to make decisions regarding the types of instructional strategies they choose to use to implement the CCSS in their classroom?

Thornton (2008) explains that as gatekeepers, teachers make curricular and instructional decisions in the place where they ultimately count--- in the classroom. If teachers are to promote the goals of the CCSS, it is crucial that they understand the goals of the CCSS and determine

how their students will achieve them. To that end, the extant research is clear that professional and staff development is vital to the success of the CCSS. Lee and Swan (2013) believe that the CCSS present a unique challenge to social studies educators, stating that the CCSS put social studies teachers in the position of possibly having to adjust their practice to meet new demands for literacy instruction. Lee and Swan (2013) further discuss that questions such as the following may arise: how can we fit the new CCSS into an already packed social studies curriculum, and what types of staff development will be available to teachers for support?

Questions about professional development surfaced during the interviews. Even though all the participants implemented the CCSS to some degree, participants reported that at times they did not feel adequately prepared to fully make decisions regarding the types of instructional strategies they chose to use to implement the CCSS in their classrooms, in large part because they expressed insufficient teacher education. And not having enough resources provided.

Participants also identified an inconsistency and limited focus within the Professional Learning Community (PLC). As Thornton (2005) points out, “Lack of considered purpose does not necessarily lead to poor practice, but it does commonly lead to indifferent practice, where instruction lacks an adequate compass to guide what is worth teaching at a given time to a given group of students” (p.6). It would seem that the PLC missed an important opportunity to consistently focus on the CCSS to provide teachers with adequate time to discuss how to implement the standards.

Insufficient Teacher Education and Resources

Teachers need the proper professional development for understanding the standards as well as knowing how to effectively implement them. As McTighe and Wiggins (2013) state, failure to understand the standards and adjust practices accordingly will likely result in the “same old, same old” teaching and their ability to enhance student performance will be minimal. McTighe and Wiggins go on to state that it is imperative for educators to understand the purpose of the standards in order to work with them effectively, recommending that schools schedule time for staff to read and discuss the standards. As seen with Nancy and Anshus, their insufficient understanding and frustration regarding the CCSS led to a decrease in the number of instructional strategies that promote the skills associated with the standards. Fullan (2007) states that individual teachers must experience some part of the proposed change, in this case the CCSS, before understanding what the change really is. It seems that teachers were not given enough time to fully understand the CCSS before being expected to implement them in their classrooms.

As previously mentioned, the CCSS are quite different from the NGSSS. Most notably, the CCSS place more emphasis on Language Arts and higher order thinking skills than the NGSSS (see Appendix A). To effectively implement the CCSS, teachers are anticipated employ higher order Language Arts-based skills in their classrooms. Calkins et al. (2012) state that the CCSS’s expectations reveal that the standards place a much stronger emphasis on higher-level comprehension skills. To assure that all students are receiving the same high level of education, the standards are much more literacy based and complex than many of the current states’ standards teachers are using. Social studies teachers have been teaching reading and writing within their classrooms for quite some time; however, the level and degree to which they will be

teaching reading and writing skills is expected change due to the CCSS. As seen in this study, many of the skills within the CCSS are best practices however the skills within are at a much higher level of learning hence why teachers felt inadequately prepared at times.

Sawchuk (2012) discusses that teachers themselves will be required to function on a higher cognitive plane once the CCSS are instituted. Thus, staff development will be vital to ensure that teachers are able to implement the higher order Language Arts-based skills within the CCSS. If the CCSS are prompting higher order thinking skills required of all students, then teachers will need to increase their knowledge on content as well as how to teach the new standards. For teachers to be able to understand the new standards they must be afforded ample staff development training where the standards will be unpacked or broken down. They also will need concrete strategies to use in their classrooms along with tangible resources to use during the implementation.

Each participant expressed concern that there has been a shortage of professional development provided that focuses on how social studies teachers should implement the CCSS in their classrooms. Three out of five participants stated that this was a factor that made them feel inadequately prepared to fully implement the CCSS in their classrooms. Nancy and Anshus discussed lacking the confidence of using the types of instructional strategies that would effectively implement the CCSS. They both stated that content-specific professional development would increase their level of comfort in regards to not only making decisions regarding the types of instructional strategies that should be used but also their comfort level to teach them. Nancy, for example, stated that she felt uncomfortable and “inadequate” teaching some of the Language Arts-based skills in her classroom due to not fully understanding how to do so. Further, Nancy expressed that she would like to have time to collaborate with Language

Arts teachers to discuss how she could use more literacy-based instruction in her social studies classes. This is in keeping with Hermeling's (2013) argument about the importance of professional development and much more cross-departmental collaboration to see that a common approach to these skills is utilized.

All participants explained that they are actively supporting Language Arts teachers in higher order reading and writing skills. Marie, for example, discussed how she knows these types of higher order thinking skills are needed for her students to do well in Advanced Placement courses in high school. Felicia noted that she is aware that these types of skills are tested on the Florida Standards Assessment. Both participants knew that they should provide students with the opportunities to analyze, interpret, gather evidence, and learn how to examine multiple perspectives to deepen knowledge for their future success. However, each participant expressed that although staff development that focused on how to incorporate these skills within his or her specific content area would be highly beneficial, they had not received such training.

Participants raised concerns that not enough resources were provided to them, specifically in regards to the CCSS and their specific content area. Three out of five participants stated that this was a factor in feeling inadequately prepared to completely and effectively implement the CCSS in their classrooms. Felicia, for example, stated that resources providing examples of what the CCSS look like in her social studies classroom would be helpful. Yet, useful resources had not be offered or distributed. If teachers were provided with adequate resources to use and concrete examples of the types of instructional strategies that could be used to implement the CCSS in a social studies classroom, more teachers might be inclined to implement them.

Participants stated that the CCSS were listed alongside the NGSSS on the curriculum maps provided by the school district. However, no additional resources regarding the CCSS were given to them to assist in the implementation. The implication was that teachers were to enact the curriculum maps in their classrooms through their own means. Upon my examination of the curriculum maps, it was discovered that immediately following the NGSSS and the CCSS there was a section that listed additional resources that could be used to support particular units. However, curriculum maps among the three grade levels (grades 6, 7, and 8) were inconsistent regarding the resources that were provided and the resources provided were not Common Core specific. The 6th grade World History curriculum map provided a section titled “Unit Resources” which had two to three websites listed, the number of resources provided varied from unit to unit, and a corresponding *History Alive!* Unit published by the Teachers Curriculum Institute (2002) that could be used. There were no recommendations of DBQs that could be used or any resources that would assist in the implementation of the CCSS. The 7th grade Civics curriculum map provided included a section called “Unit Resources” which provided many more websites than the World History curriculum map. The Civics curriculum map listed specific textbook chapters that were appropriate for that unit of study as well as DBQs that could be used for that unit. The 8th grade U.S History curriculum map provided a section titled “Textbook Correlation” that stated which textbook chapters were appropriate for that unit of study and a section titled “AP Course Differentiation” which listed DBQs that could be used for that unit. No websites or CCSS specific resources were listed.

Participants noted that they are aware of available CCSS resources online. However, Nancy and Felicia felt that the district should do a better job providing them with resources that would assist them in effectively implementing the CCSS in their classrooms.

Inconsistent Focus of PLC

Within the extant literature on the CCSS, it is stressed how important Professional Learning Communities (PLC) will be to the successful implementation of the standards. School leaders will need to arrange ways for teachers to apply strategies and methods across classrooms so that students can transfer these literacy skills across disciplines. This ability to effectively utilize the strategies in the classroom necessitates a comprehensive understanding of what the standards entail. Any set of standards will be useless if teachers do not understand them and are not adequately trained on how to effectively teach them.

One way to provide teachers with the support they will need is through PLCs. PLCs are meant to provide teachers from the same content area an allotted amount of time each week to collaborate and share best practices. Larson (2012) stresses the importance of professional development opportunities and professional learning communities if teachers are going to be able to adapt to the CCSS and effectively improve their instruction to meet the imperatives of the CCSS. As discussed in Chapter 2, the PLC can be a vital way for teachers to discuss ways in which the CCSS can be successfully implemented in the classroom. They also provide a venue for teachers to share and exchange resources and learn how others are meeting the challenge of addressing CCSS mandates.

Participants expressed concern with the inconsistency of focus within their PLCs at Eastside Middle. The focus of the PLC is determined by district personnel and based off of the overall goals of the district for that school year. By “inconsistent,” participants meant that during the 2013-2014 school year the focus within the PLC was on the CCSS: unpacking them, discussing instructional strategies to implement them, creating scales for students to use based on them, and creating common assessments. During the 2014-2015 school year the focus changed

within the PLCs. The focus was no longer on the CCSS. Teachers still discussed best practices, created scales, and common assessments but no longer focused on the CCSS.

Three out of five participants stated the inconsistent focus made them feel inadequately prepared to make decisions regarding the implementation of the CCSS. Nancy, for example, discussed that during the beginning the 2013-2014 school year her Civics PLC focused on unpacking the CCSS and discussed strategies to implement them. Within her PLC they also focused on creating scales for students to use to track their progress. The scales they created were based on skills within the CCSS. She further stated that she felt this time spent on discussing the CCSS and collaborating how to implement the standards in their classrooms was helpful. Then during the 2014-2015 school year the focus shifted from the CCSS to more of an emphasis on creating common assessments based on the NGSSS. Anshus, for example, stated that she felt during the 2013-2014 school year (when the focus was on the CCSS) she saw great value in meeting with her PLC because teachers were learning from each other. Her PLC shared instructional strategies that would be best used to implement the skills within the standards which she felt was very helpful.

It was evident that the focus on the CCSS was there in 2013-2014 and four out of five participants said that during this time the PLC was useful; but then the focus shifted away from CCSS in 2014-2015 and participants' perceptions were that other things were receiving more importance from the school district. Each participant expressed that the PLC would be an excellent place to discuss the CCSS and instructional strategies that could be used to successfully implement the standards. Participants expressed the belief that the 50 minutes allotted each week for the PLC to meet would be enough time to address the teachers' concerns regarding the CCSS, if the time was truly focused on the CCSS. However, the following year, when the PLC's

focus shifted to less emphasis on the CCSS teachers were confused and it wasn't stated why there was a shift away from the CCSS.

Analysis Research Question 4: What instructional successes do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS in their classrooms?

Participants explained that the number one success that they have experienced while implementing the CCSS was the overall improvement they have seen in their students' reading and writing abilities. Overall, participants reported that by the end of the 2014-2015 school year, their students experienced less frustration analyzing documents and understood how to effectively use evidence from the documents within their writing. For example, Marie noted that most of her students could successfully write a thesis statement and Felicia was impressed that her students could keep their opinions out and keep their historical essay arguments fact-based on evidence from the documents. Periodically, Rusty had students reflect on their learning. Numerous students stated that they feel more comfortable with the writing process.

The overall improvement teachers saw in their students' reading and writing abilities may add to the existing literature on a teacher's curricular and instructional gatekeeper role and further avenues to explore. Will teachers use these strategies more since they have seen improvements in their students' skill set? Will this ultimately boost teachers' confidence and influence their decision-making? These are all questions that can be explored in further research.

Analysis Research Question 5: What instructional challenges do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS in their classrooms?

The factors previously discussed that caused participants to feel inadequately prepared to make decisions regarding the types of instructional strategies to use while implementing the CCSS were also some of the challenges participants experienced. Namely, participants identified

an inconsistent and shifting focus, insufficient professional development, and limited resources as significant challenges they encountered when implementing the CCSS in their classrooms.

Four out of five participants discussed how the inconsistent focus of the CCSS at the state, district, and/or school levels has been a challenge. As previously discussed, in the state of Florida the CCSS are now called the Florida Standards. The FLDOE changed some of the phrasing of existing standards and added a few new standards. Even though portions of the CCSS wording has been revised, standards have been added, and the name has been changed, teachers within my county and many other counties in Florida still refer to the new standards as the Common Core. Social studies teachers are expected to teach the Florida Standards which are the CCSS “layered” on top of the NGSSS. The curriculum maps provided by the district display the CCSS and NGSSS as two separate entities, which is different from the FLDOE’s presentation of the Florida Standards. Teachers were not informed or explained the process regarding the changes in the standards and the name change. Fullan (2008) states that the collaboration process needs to happen within the district and state level not just at the school level. Teachers should have been notified regarding the name change from the CCSS to the Florida Standards Assessment. Even though the standards were similar, they were no longer labeled as CCSS on the state’s website. Also, the focus was on the CCSS during the 2013-2014 school year and then the focus shifted during the 2014-2015 school year and no explanation was given from the state, district, or school.

As previously discussed participants have expressed frustration regarding not fully understanding the CCSS and how to effectively implement the standards in their classrooms. This is in keeping with Alberti’s (2012) argument that one of the most important factors within the initiative processes of the CCSS will be to make sure teachers understand the changes that

the standards will bring. The inconsistency among the state, district, and school level has caused challenges for teachers when implementing the CCSS. Four out of five participants expressed concern of policies changing so often at the state and district level and this causes confusion on what exactly they should be focusing on at the school level. Nancy, for example, expressed great concern that the policies within education change so often and the transition to the CCSS has been challenging for teachers and students. Rusty also shared his concern of how often changes and the constant inconsistency can be frustrating and confusing.

Similarly, four out five participants described how the teacher education resulted in their feelings of inadequacy in completely implementing the CCSS in their classrooms. Each participant reported that content-specific staff development would have been useful to understanding and implementing the CCSS. It is difficult to implement standards in one's classroom when one is not sure exactly how to do so. Felicia and Anshus mentioned that if they were provided with tangible examples of what the CCSS specifically looked like in social studies classrooms, it would have been very helpful during the planning and implementation of the standards. Limited teacher education was clearly a challenge that caused teachers to feel inadequately prepared to fully implement the CCSS in their classrooms.

The inadequate number of resources also surfaced time and again in the interviews. Three out five participants expressed concern about the insufficient number of CCSS resources that were provided to them. A need for content-specific CCSS resources were mentioned by Felicia and Anshus, both stating that resources would have been of value to them when deciding what instructional strategies to use in their classrooms. These resources, however, were not forthcoming from either the state or the school district.

For the first few years of implementation, teachers need ample amount of professional and staff developments since the CCSS are much more rigorous and skill-based compared with the regular content-based standards. As previously discussed, the literature states that the success of the CCSS are going to be heavily based on whether or not teachers are educated and comfortable teaching the standards. Also, abundant resources should be made available to teachers and students as well.

Researcher Reflective Journal

The researcher reflective journal has been a vital part of reflecting on my role as a researcher. I felt that having a previous relationship with the participants proved to be a positive experience for both the participants and myself. I feel that each participant had a certain degree of comfort with me since at times it felt like we were having a casual conversation versus a scheduled interview.

The four factors previously discussed: being a Civics PLC Leader, writing my literature review as a graduate student, attending national and state social studies conferences, and teaching gifted social studies definitely made me more comfortable understanding and implementing the CCSS in my classroom. I had to keep this in mind throughout the whole interview process. I had to remember that my experiences have indeed made me more prepared to implement the types of skills associated with the CCSS compared to the participants I was working with. Even though I felt I had much experience with the CCSS I did agree with many of the concerns all the participants discussed. I too felt more resources should have been provided and more content-specific staff developments could have also been provided to us. Even though the name has changed from the CCSS to the Florida Standards we still should be supported with information on how to implement these types of higher order Language Arts-based skills in our social studies classrooms. It is especially true since the FSA and EOC exams have higher order

thinking type questions within them. The EOC may be content based but the formatting of the questions is geared towards the CCSS. I also agree with the participants that as a social studies teacher we actively support Language Arts teachers. I feel more support on how to implement higher level Language Arts-based skills in social studies classes would be very beneficial. The district where Eastside resides and Eastside Middle is now utilizing Canvas, which hosts many content-specific resources for teachers to use as well as more Language Arts based resources for social studies teachers to use. I feel this will be helpful to teachers this current school year.

Even though I felt knowledgeable about the CCSS, I share my colleagues' frustrations regarding the inconsistencies at the school, district, and state levels. During the 2013-2014 school year we were under the impression that the CCSS were here to stay. Our PLCs were focused on the CCSS for an entire school year. The change that took place the following school year was never fully explained to teachers, this was very frustrating and caused confusion among many. As previously discussed there are also inconsistencies in the way the standards are presented on the states and district's websites. It is quite frustrating. And I completely understand why teachers are so confused. Policies change so often and teachers are most often the last people to hear about the changes or we do here so from an email from the district. This has got to change so teachers fully understand what is expected of them and then they will be able to adjust their teaching practices to accommodate the changes.

Recommendations

The purpose of this research study was to examine how the implementation of the CCSS might affect the instructional decision-making of middle school social studies teachers and the types of instructional strategies teachers reported using in response to the CCSS. Also, the purpose was to uncover any successes and/or challenges teachers have experienced while

implementing the CCSS. The CCSS affected teachers' decision-making. Teachers noted that they increased the number of higher order reading and writing instructional strategies they chose to use in their classrooms. Based on the research findings of this study, the following recommendations for practice, as well as directions for future research are offered.

Recommendations for Social Studies Teacher Education

The academic rigor and the expectation that all students are college- and career- ready associated with the CCSS is expected to bring changes in the way teachers approach curriculum and instruction. As seen in this study, participants noted that they increased the number of higher order reading and writing instructional strategies they chose to use in their classrooms and at times felt inadequately prepared to fully implement the CCSS in their classrooms. Based on these findings the following recommendations are provided for social studies teacher education.

Pre-Service Teacher Education

This research informs social studies teacher education programs at the college level regarding the CCSS by demonstrating a curricular shift with the use of higher order reading and writing skills. This shift affects the types of instructional strategies middle school social studies teachers should use to implement the CCSS in their classrooms. Pre-service teachers need to be aware of the types of Language Arts-based skills that they will need to implement due to the CCSS. This shift should also influence the types of instructional strategies being taught in middle and high school methods courses. Pre-service teachers should be provided with adequate methods to use to implement the CCSS in their classrooms. Calkins et al. (2012) discuss that one concern will be that many teachers across content areas never received training or practice with these skills in their education. Relevant literature highlights the importance of staff development, and this should start with teacher education programs and continue with professional development for practicing teachers.

Through this research it can be seen that some of the participants felt that they lacked the proper teacher education to effectively execute some of the higher order Language Arts-based skills necessary to fully implement the CCSS. This type of teacher education could be valuable to pre-service teachers. There should be a clear understanding that social studies teachers teach social studies content based on the state content standards, using a plethora of reading and writing skills based on the CCSS. This should remain constant no matter what new reform movement is put into effect. As seen in the literature and within this study many of the standards within the Common Core are best practices that social studies teachers already try to utilize in their classrooms. Pre-service teachers should be given the opportunity to understand the difference between content standards such as the NGSSS or other state standards and Language Arts-skill based standards such as the CCSS. The presentation of the social studies content standards and skill-based standards should be presented and discussed in college level social studies methods courses so pre-service teachers understand the differences between the standards and how to effectively implement them. For example, pre-service teachers should be given the opportunity to “unpack” standards to ensure their understanding of them. Once the standards are broken down for understanding they should be given time to explore possible instructional strategies that could be used in their classrooms. They should also be given the opportunity to execute these types of instructional strategies in class and within the classroom during practicums and internships. Not to say this doesn’t already take place but a stronger emphasis should be put on the fact that social studies teachers at times teach higher order Language Arts-based skills in their classrooms.

Another point that should be stressed in college level social studies courses is the connection between the skills that are taught in social studies and the skills within standardized

assessments. As seen in this study, teachers feel they play a support role to Language Arts teachers preparing students for the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) and each participant discussed that content-specific CCSS teacher education would have been helpful and this could start in pre-service education courses. Teachers should be given ample time to examine the standards, both content and skill-based, and examine the types of questions within the FSA and the EOC so they can understand there is a connection and in turn are better equipped to prepare their students for the types of questions they will be exposed to on standardized assessment. Pre-service teachers should be given time to discuss, create, and implement instructional strategies that could be used to teach such skills within standardized assessments.

In-Service Professional Development

A major concern opponents have with the CCSS is that social studies teachers will not be offered adequate professional development to understand and effectively implement the standards in their classrooms. All participants expressed concern of not being offered content-specific staff developments to assist in their implementation of the CCSS. This supports Larson's (2012) argument stressing the importance of professional development opportunities and professional learning communities if teachers are going to be able to adapt to the CCSS and effectively improve their instruction to meet the imperatives of the CCSS. Ross (2006) states the most effective means of improving curriculum is to improve the professional development given to teachers. Teachers need to be better prepared to exercise their curricular decision-making responsibilities that are a crucial part of instructional practice. An increase in content-specific professional development should be offered to social studies teachers where concrete examples of how to implement the CCSS are provided. Content-specific meaning, for example Civics teachers should be provided staff development that will equip them with examples of how they can apply the CCSS specifically within their Civics classes. Teachers should be given time to

fully understand the standards, given time to collaborate with other teachers from their content-specific classes, and given time to create instructional strategies that could be used to implement the CCSS in their content-specific classes. The instructional strategies used to implement the CCSS in a Civics class may differ from the instructional strategies used in an AP Geography or Economics course. This is keeping with Van Hover's (2008) argument that evidence does suggest that effective professional development can lead to teacher learning and improvements in classroom practice.

Such professional development opportunities should be offered at the district and school levels. School districts should increase the amount of content-specific professional developments offered to ensure that teachers feel comfortable enough to execute the higher-level Language Arts-based skills associated with the CCSS. Schools could provide content-specific staff developments based on the teachers' needs of the school. Administration could conduct surveys to determine what teachers' would like more staff development in. In this case, social studies teachers want more concrete examples and resources provided to assist in their implementation of the CCSS. School districts could also provide staff developments days focused on social studies teachers and the implementation of the CCSS again where teachers could collaborate with one another and share best practices and well as be provided with examples and resources. A last option, districts could provide teachers with the opportunity to attend State Social Studies conferences where teachers could attend sessions focused on the CCSS and network with other social studies teachers from around the state. The questions would remain, would teachers attend such staff developments if given the opportunity? Would this be enough support for teachers to adequately make decisions curricular and instructional regarding the CCSS?

As the findings reveal, teachers reported an increase in the use of Language Arts-based skills associated with the CCSS also expressing they play an active role in supporting Language arts teachers. This is keeping with Rothman's (2012b) argument that the shift among ELA Standards will increase the need for students to read more non-fictional texts, focus more on evidence from the texts by reading things more closely, often times re-reading the text, and increase the level of text complexity in what students will be expected to read. Practicing social studies teachers need to be provided with adequate professional development to be fully prepared to implement Language Arts- based skills such as the ones just discussed in their social studies classrooms. Nancy and Anshus reported that they lacked the confidence in teaching some of the Language Arts-based skills associated with the CCSS. Nancy specifically mentioned that she felt having time to collaborate with her Language Arts teachers would be beneficial. This is supporting Hermeling's (2013) argument of the importance of professional development and much more cross-departmental collaboration to see that a common approach to these skills is utilized. Professional development opportunities should be offered at the district and school levels where social studies and Language Arts teachers collaborate with one another sharing best practices that could be used to implement the CCSS. The CCSS for the social studies are primarily Language Arts based so social studies teachers should be given time to collaborate with Language Arts teachers to discuss instructional strategies that could be used in their social studies classrooms. The Professional Learning Communities at the school level could also be utilized for such collaboration. One day a month social studies and Language Arts teachers could meet to discuss and share instructional strategies that are used in their classrooms that promote the skills within the CCSS. It might be useful for social studies teachers to conduct walk-

throughs where Language Arts teachers model and share best practices. Walk-throughs could also be conducted within the PLC time.

Social studies is not one of the targeted content areas in the CCSS and is not assessed in the FSA. By contrast, Language Arts receives an inordinate amount of attention in the CCSS- indeed some would argue that it is the cornerstone of the CCSS. In turn, that might result in the impression that social studies are a junior partner to Language Arts. Further, social studies teachers must master their content to effectively teach their subject matter however I do believe that social studies teachers also play an active support role supporting Language Arts-based skills. Social studies teachers should try to find a balance between teaching their content standards and their skill based standards. Social studies teachers use a variety of instructional strategies to teach their content and quite often they use Language Arts- based skills to do so. I feel that many instructional strategies used in social studies classes such as analyzing documents to extract useful evidence to support a point of view is considered both a social studies and Language Arts instructional strategy. I conclude that social studies teachers and their students will only benefit from social studies teachers learning how to effectively implement Language Arts-based skills within their classrooms.

Specialized Instructional Resources

Based on the findings of the study it would be valuable for curriculum developers to create resources for social studies teachers to assist them in effectively implementing the Language Arts-based skills incorporated within the CCSS. Providing concrete examples of instructional strategies that teachers can use could possibly lower frustration levels and raise confidence among them. If social studies teachers are more confident in teaching Language Arts-based skills they may be more inclined to use these types of strategies in their classrooms. Teachers should be provided with ample resources to support their efforts in adequately

executing the CCSS in their classrooms. Resources such as content-specific primary and secondary sources that can be used for analyzing, outside informational readings that would be appropriate for examining multiple perspectives and close reading strategies, and historical and argumentative writing prompts that can be used. The state and the district should provide resources to ensure that teachers feel adequately prepared to implement the CCSS. Textbook companies often supply supplemental resources for students to use such as guided reading workbooks or possible activities for teachers to use with a specific unit. Textbook companies could further provide CCSS resources and instructional strategies that teachers could have immediate access to. There is a difference between telling teachers how to teach and providing them with sufficient resources to help them be successful. Providing content-specific resources to teachers will better prepare them to effectively implement the CCSS in their classrooms.

Recommendations School District Personnel

This research will assist in professional development efforts by informing school district personnel about the processes, challenges, and successes teachers have experienced while implementing the CCSS in their classrooms.

This research revealed that there is a correlation between standardized testing and the implementation of the CCSS. The connection between standardized tests and the Language Arts-based skills associated with the CCSS is one factor that influenced social studies teachers' instructional decision-making. Each participant was cognizant that the skills tested within the FSA and EOC assessment were skills associated with the CCSS. This research uncovered that social studies teachers see themselves having an active role in supporting Language Arts teachers. All participants stated that they use Language Arts-based skills in their classrooms to support their Language Arts teachers. School district personnel should provide time for

Language Arts and social studies department heads from middle schools in the county to collaborate and discuss best practices and instructional strategies that could be used across content areas. Then department heads could share this information with the teachers at their schools

As discussed, the literature states that teacher education and staff developments will play a vital role in the successful implementation of the CCSS. Participants noted that a major challenge they have experienced while implementing the CCSS has been insufficient staff development focusing on how to use the standards in their social studies classrooms. District personnel must insure their teachers are provided with ample staff development when curricular changes are going to take place. It is the district's responsibility to make sure their teachers fully understand the upcoming changes. Once teachers understand the changes that are going to take place then staff developments need to be provided to insure they are fully prepared to implement the changes. As previously discussed, content-specific CCSS professional development should be offered by the district. School district personnel need to realize that middle school social studies teachers play a vital role in preparing students with the content and skills needed to succeed in higher education as well as preparing them for standardized tests.

Participants within this study stated that they had a general confusion regarding the CCSS due to the inconsistent focus of the standards at the state and district level. During the 2013-2014 school year teachers at Eastside heavily focused on the CCSS then the following school year the focus shifted away from the CCSS. Teachers were never given an explanation to why there was a shift in the focus. The name change from the CCSS to the Florida Standards might have been a factor in the shift of focus. I decided to investigate both the districts and state's presentation of standards on both of their websites. It was determined that there was inconsistency of how the

standards were listed on the district's and the FLDOE website. The FLDOE website takes teachers to a website named CPALMS to find the Florida Standards. CPLAMS is an online toolbox where teachers can find resources to help them implement the Florida Standards. The Florida Standards for social studies are essentially the NGSSS and the CCSS combined. The district's Canvas Secondary Learning Network Middle 2015-2016 website provides social studies curriculum maps with both the NGSSS and CCSS listed. There should be consistency among all levels: state, district, and school settings for the standards to be easily accessible and understandable. The standards should be presented consistently among all three levels. The district should be held responsible for disseminating accurate and up to date information to their teachers and the state should be held responsible for insuring that school districts are doing so.

Recommendations for Further Research

The findings of this study indicate that further research needs to be conducted in the overall effects the CCSS have on teachers' curricular and instructional practices. Specifically, studies with larger sample sizes, more diverse participants, in other school districts and settings would contribute to a more robust understanding of the CCSS and their effects on middle school social studies teachers' decision-making.

It would be beneficial to increase the sample size to include more teachers from different schools and school districts to increase the generalizability of this study. Additional aspects to explore include: Are middle school social studies teachers' instructional decision-making from other school districts influenced by the same factors uncovered in this study?, Are teachers from other school districts experiencing the same successes and challenges while implementing the CCSS?, Are there inconsistencies regarding the Florida standards among other school districts within Florida?, and Does where a teacher studied and obtained their teacher education play a role in their personal beliefs and instructional decision-making?

Self-reported data gathered through interviews always has some limitations. Conducting classroom observations as part of the data collection would also be useful in shedding light on teachers' instructional gate-keeping role. It is possible that participants may be implementing more of the CCSS than they are aware of; through direct observations this could be uncovered. Just because participants did not discuss their use of implementing the CCSS within the interviews does not mean they do not apply them in their classrooms. The converse is also possible: participants may report teaching more CCSS skills than they actually do. Direct observations would be helpful to uncover other instructional strategies teachers are utilizing in their classrooms that are both best practices and foster the rigor of the CCSS. Also, conducting an ethnographical study would be beneficial to observe participants over time to uncover possible changes in a teacher's instructional practices when new mandates are implemented. Observations would also be useful to explore the overall affects of content-specific professional developments that teachers participate in. This supports Van Hover's (2008) discussion that there is very little research that explores the impact of professional development on teachers' classroom instruction and student achievement over time.

Advocates of CCSS contend that the CCSS will assist in preparing all students for the challenges of college or career, stating that a large proportion of U.S. high school graduates are not prepared for the future. Advocates also argue that the CCSS will prepare all students for whatever path they choose in the future, suggesting that they will be college and/or career ready and will be able to compete in the global market. Haycock (2012) states that if properly implemented, CCSS schools will raise their expectations for all children, and engage all learners, rather than just a privileged few. However, there is not a lot of empirical data showing how and if the CCSS are contributing to the overall preparedness of students once they leave high school.

At this time it is unclear whether the CCSS are actually raising achievement levels and creating a more equal learning environment for all students in our country. Castillo and Lukan (2011) note that the NCLR, the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization, believes that the CCSS are part of the solution to improving education for Latino students, by providing all students with the same access to a rigorous curriculum that will prepare them for college and/or their future careers. This point should be further explored. Are schools raising their expectations for all children? And if so how are they achieving this goal and are achievement levels rising across all student populations due to the CCSS?

Another avenue to explore in future research is to what degree the online learning management system that has been introduced in the school district is supporting the curricular and instructional needs of teachers. During the current 2015-2016 school year many more resources are being provided to the teachers at Eastside Middle. Eastside as well as other schools in the county now use the online system Canvas to disseminate information to their teachers. With Canvas, the district and Eastside provide teachers with resources to help guide their instruction. The web resources that are provided focus on the EOC and Language Arts-based instruction and there are articles focusing what rigor looks like in the classroom. Eastside also has a full time Learning Design Coach to support the needs of the teacher. The Learning Design Coach is on campus to support the curricular and instructional needs of all instructional staff. The coach assists in gathering specific instructional resources teachers may need and modeling specific instructional strategies that teachers are interested in implementing in their classrooms. I would like to further examine the new systems in place at Eastside and determine how the new resources are affecting the curricular and instructional decision-making of teachers.

It would be beneficial to investigate how effective are Professional Learning Communities in the school setting and how PLCs might affect a teachers' curricular and instructional decision-making? Participants explained that when the PLC had a clear focus the time was very useful for planning and collaborating with one another. One of the main focuses of the 2015-2016 PLC at Eastside is focusing on "high impact instruction", student engagement, and what do when students do not meet proficient levels of learning. Teachers are given time to discuss rigorous and engaging instructional strategies that can be used in their classrooms. This supports Fullan's (2008) argument that professional learning communities should be a place where teachers can learn from one another and its focus in instructional improvement is critical. Fullan (2008) further stated, characteristics of professional communities include: focus of instruction, using student data as a means of improvement, and teachers collaborating with one another through planning. It is apparent that the PLCs at Eastside have many of the qualities needed to effectively support teachers. Eastside provides a Canvas course specifically designed for PLC Facilitators or, as previously discussed, PLC Leaders. Within the PLC Facilitators Resource Canvas course, many different resources are provided such as: student engagement videos, planning ELA resources, DBQ resources, articles on the CCSS, and articles on academic writing across the disciplines. I have access to the Canvas resource to share with the rest of my PLC as the PLC leader for 7th grade Civics. I believe Canvas will be an excellent resource to be used within our PLCs. Further examination should be completed to see the effects of the PLC on teachers' curricular and instructional decision-making.

New mandates come and go rather quickly within education. Each participant had positive beliefs towards the CCSS such as; the standards are rigorous and foster higher order thinking skills that should be implemented in a social studies classroom and all students across

the country should be exposed to such high standards. It would be interesting to explore how genuine the participants' responses were to the CCSS. Do teachers really feel the standards are "good" or were they just being compliant to yet another new mandate they felt they had to implement?

Finally, another question to explore is could the CCSS be part of a hidden curriculum and how might it affect collateral learning of students? Thornton (2014) discusses that not all of a school's learning objectives and activities are explicitly explained and through a hidden curriculum, via routines and attitudes, instructional outcomes are generated. It would be interesting to explore if the CCSS is part of a hidden curriculum where unintended learning outcomes are the result. One could argue that the CCSS is not part of the explicit curriculum. As previously explained they are now "layered" on top of the NGSSS to form the Florida Standards. Even though the standards aren't explicitly explained teachers are still utilizing them in their classrooms. John Dewey (1938) points out how "collateral learning", via routines and attitudes, affects what students take away from their experiences in the classroom. Dewey (1938) goes on to argue that "collateral learning" has a greater or equal educational significance than the explicit curriculum since the habits and attitudes students take away have a greater lasting affect on them. I would further like to explore what types of "collateral learning" do students take away from the CCSS?

Conclusions and Implications

Overall, there are many factors that influence a teacher's decision-making and their ultimate role as a curricular and instructional gatekeeper. As uncovered in this study, specific factors influenced participants' decision-making when choosing what instructional strategies would be most affective when implementing the CCSS. And ultimately, these factors influenced the curricular and instructional gatekeeping role of these five middle school social studies teachers.

At times, teachers felt inadequately prepared to effectively implement the CCSS in their classrooms. The inadequate feelings were overwhelmingly caused by insufficient professional development focusing on the CCSS for social studies. The increase in rigor and Language Arts-based skills associated with the CCSS for social studies is quite different from the NGSSS. Teacher education and staff development are vital to the success of any new program. A better line of communication must be created informing teachers of the standards. Teacher education must be made available so teachers understand the language of the standards and know how to effectively implement them in their classrooms.

Opponents of the CCSS stressed that the new standards would fail if teachers were not provided with ample staff development to understand and effectively implement the higher level of critical thinking skills associated with the CCSS. Opponents also feared that the standards would be unsuccessful if teachers were not provided time to collaborate with other content-specific teachers as well as being provided adequate instructional resources connected with the CCSS. Further stating broken promises would be made of providing staff developments, time to collaborate, and resources to support their teachers. This research supports such claims of not being provided with ample support systems to insure the success of these new standards. Social studies teachers are confused about exactly how and to what extent they are supposed to

implement the CCSS. For effective policy implementation to take place it is vital for teachers to understand the changes and given the necessary support to successfully put into action the new policy.

Social studies teachers are taking on a vital role by supporting Language Arts teachers when they foster higher order thinking and literacy-based skills in their classrooms. The skills within the FSA and the EOC are associated with the skills within the CCSS. Each participant was aware that the types of questions within both assessments were connected to the CCSS. Many of the CCSS are best practices that teachers should be focusing on such as analyzing primary and secondary sources however social studies teachers need more staff development and more resources to assist them in implementing the rigorous Language Arts-based skills in their classrooms. Social studies teachers can be valuable resources supporting Language Arts teachers. Social studies teachers must understand that they can teach their content through the CCSS. Teachers shouldn't feel as though they have less time for "fun" projects they need to incorporate types of projects that are engaging and geared towards the types of skills within the CCSS. Social studies teachers need to find a healthy balance between their content standards and skill-based standards.

A major challenge each participant experienced while implementing the CCSS in his or her classrooms was the overall confusion they felt regarding them. There was limited consistency on the focus of them at the state, district, and school level. A better line of communication must be created informing teachers of major changes that are taking place regarding the standards that are expected of them to teach. As previously discussed, teachers in the trenches are usually the last ones to know of major changes. Based on my discussions with participants, they are eager to learn and do what is best for students but being confused by CCSS and its expectations

causes frustration and often makes people unwilling to cooperate and do what is expected of them. Once the CCSS are implemented over the course of a few years and students are learning these types of skills earlier on in school, they will be more comfortable and teachers will feel more comfortable too. But right now, due to the dramatic shift, teachers and students are experiencing frustration. There has been an inconsistent focus and poor communication on multiple levels.

Although teachers are the ultimate gatekeepers of the curriculum, they are often the last group of people in the “education food chain” to be informed of major changes. Further, they often have little or no voice in the sweeping changes that often take place within the educational system at the state, district, and local levels. Yet they are nonetheless required by law and ethics to uphold the mandated curriculum even when, and as seen within this study, they do not fully understand the changes or what is expected of them.

Within the school setting it is often discussed: What do we do as teachers when our students do not reach proficiency? My question is: What do we do when teachers do not reach proficiency? I have seen many changes within the education system during the ten years I have taught. Programs come and go, and teachers have to quickly adapt to the changes. Curricula and mandates change so rapidly, rarely are there support systems in place to make sure teachers are truly understanding the changes and more importantly how these changes affect the students in their classrooms. Yet the systems in place seem to only minimally support teachers of these changes.

Teachers have the most rewarding yet difficult profession. There are many roles teachers play and as curricular and instructional gatekeepers they hold the key to unlock and open many doors for the students in their classrooms. There are many decisions that teachers make that

affects their ability to unlock and open those doors. For teachers to be able to effectively do their jobs within their classrooms they must be provided with the proper tools to do so. These tools must include an understanding of what is expected of them (usually in the form of staff development), time to plan and collaborate with other teachers, grade-appropriate instructional resources, and an adequate support system at the district and school levels. If teachers are to provide students with opportunities to reach their highest potential, they must be properly equipped to do so. The results of this study can provide guidance on how to do that. Now we must ensure that school systems prioritize that procedures are in place so teachers can also reach their highest potential.

REFERENCES

- Alberti, S. (2012). Making the shifts. *Educational Leadership*, 70(4), 24-27.
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, (2012). *Fulfilling the promise of the Common Core State Standards: Moving from adoption to implantation to sustainability*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. Retrieved from www.ascd.org/commoncore.
- Au, W. (2009). Social studies, social justice: W (h)ither the social studies in high-stakes testing?. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 43-58.
- Beach, R., Thein, A. H., & Webb, A. (2012). *Teaching to exceed the English Language Arts Common Core Standards: A literacy practices approach for 6-12 classrooms*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Bell, J., & Thatcher, D. (2012). Challenged to the core. *State Legislatures*, 38(8), 13-17.
- Berg, B. L. & Lune, H. (2012). *Qualitative research methods for the social sciences*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Boyles, N. (2012). Closing in on close reading. *Educational Leadership*, 70(4), 36-41.
- Bracey, G. W. (2008). Disastrous legacy: Aftermath of a nation at risk. *Dissent*, 55(4), 80-83.
- Brooks, J., & Dietz, M. E. (2012). The dangers & opportunities of the Common Core. *Educational Leadership*, 70(4), 64-67.
- Calkins, L., Ehrenworth, M., & Lehman, C. (2012). *Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating achievement*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Canvas Network. (2015). Canvas. Retrieved from www.canvaslms.com

- Carmichael, S. B., Martino, G., Porter-Magee, K., & Wilson, W. S. (2010). *The state of state standards--and the Common Core--in 2010*. Washington DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute.
- Carnegie Corporation. (1986). *A nation prepared: Teachers for the 21st century, the report of the task force on teaching as a profession*. Washington, D.C.: The Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy. Retrieved from <http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED268120>.
- Carnegie Corporation of New York: CCNY. (2014). *Carnegie corporation of New York*. Retrieved from <http://carnegie.org/about-us/foundation-history/about-andrew-carnegie/carnegie-for-kids/ccny/>.
- Castillo, D., & Lukan, J. (2011). *Access to common standards for all: An advocacy tool kit for supporting success*. Washington, D.C.: National Council of La Raza. Retrieved from http://www.nclr.org/images/uploads/pages/CCSS_Toolkit.pdf.
- Center on Education Policy. (2012). *Year two of implementing the Common Core State Standards: States' progress and challenges*. Washington, DC: Author.
- Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2014). *Frequently asked questions*. Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/frequently-asked-questions/>.
- Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2012) *Implementing the Common Core State Standards*. Retrieved from <http://www.corestandards.org/>.
- Creswell, J., & Miller, D. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice* , 39(3), 124-130.

- Davis, L. (2012). *5 things every teacher should be doing to meet the Common Core State Standards*. Eye on Education. Retrieved from www.eyeoneeducation.com.
- Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and education*. New York, NY: Macmillan.
- Education Northwest. (2010). *Spotlight on the Common Core State Standards*. Retrieved from http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/1158.
- Florida Department of Education. (2010). *2010 social studies specifications for the 2011-2012 Florida state adoption of instructional materials*. Retrieved from http://www.fldoe.org/bii/instruct_mat/pdf/socialstudies2011.pdf.
- Florida Department of Education. (2014). *Florida standards college & career ready*. Retrieved from <http://www.flstandards.org/>.
- Franco, M., & Unrath, Kathleen. (2014). Carpe diem: Seizing the Common Core with visual thinking strategies in the visual arts classroom. *Art Education*, 67(1), 28-32.
- Fullan, M. (2008). *Education and continuous improvement*. Retrieved from <http://www.michaelfullan.ca/media/13435880190.html>.
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change*, 4th Edition. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Gelbrich, J. (1999). *American education, the second half of the 20th century: Post- World War II. and beyond*. Corvallis, OR: OSU, School of Education. Retrieved at <http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/ed416/ae8.html>.
- Gewertz, C. (2012). Success of standards depends on translation for classroom. *Education Week*, 31(29), S6-S11.
- Gibbs, G. R. (2008). *Analyzing qualitative data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Goldberg, S. (2010). *National curriculum standards for social studies: Preface*. Silver Spring, MD: National Council for the Social Studies. Retrieved from <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/preface>.
- Goodlad (1984). *A place called school*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Grant, S. G. (2007). High-stakes testing: How are social studies teachers responding?. *Social Education*, 71(5), 250-254.
- Gross, N., Giacuinta, J. B., & Bernstein, M. (1971). *Implementing organizational innovations: A sociological analysis of planned educational change*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Ginn, J. (2010). States find common (core) ground. *Capitol Ideas*, 53(5), 15-17.
- Gullen, K. & Zimmerman, H. (2013). Saving time with technology. *Educational Leadership*, 70(6), 63-66.
- Hart, D. (2002). *History alive! The United States*. Palo Alto, CA: Teacher's Curriculum Institute
- Hamilton, L., Stecher, B., & Yuan, K. (2008). *Standards-based reform in the United States: History, research, and future directions* (No. RP-1384). Santa Monica, CA: Rand Education.
- Hatfield, R. C. (1973). Designing an instructional strategy. In L. Lipsitz, *The Educational Technology Review Series*. (pp.44-45). Englewood, NJ: Educational Technology.
- Haycock, K. (2012). *Implementation of Common Core State Standards: Roles for advocates*. Minneapolis. MN Policy Innovators in Education Network. Retrieved from www.pie-network.org.

- Herczog, M. M. (2010). Using the NCSS national curriculum standards for social studies: A framework for teaching, learning, and assessment to meet state social studies standards. *Social Education, 74*(4), 217-222.
- Hermeling, A. (2013). *Social studies on the outside looking in: Redeeming the neglected curriculum*. District Administration. Retrieved from <http://www.districtadministration.com/article/social-studies-outside-looking>.
- Hiebert, E. H., & Pearson, P. D. (2012). What happens to the basics? *Educational Leadership, 70*(4), 48-53.
- Housen, A. (2002). Aesthetic thought, critical thinking, and transfer. *Arts and Learning Research Journal, 18*(1), 99-131. Retrieved from http://vtshome.org/system/resources/0000/0014/Aesthetic_thought.pdf.
- Kendall, J. S. (2011). *Understanding Common Core State Standards*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Klein, A. (2014). Some in congress adding fuel to Common-Core debate. *Education Week, 33*(22), 13-16.
- King, J. E. (2011). *Implementing the Common Core State Standards: An action agenda for higher education*. State Higher Education Executive Officers. Retrieved from <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Documents/Implementing-the-Common-Core-State-Standards-2011.pdf>.
- Kist, W. (2013). New literacies and the Common Core. *Educational Leadership, 70*(6), 38-43.
- Kober, N., & Rentner, D. S. (2011). *States' progress and challenges in implementing Common Core State Standards*. Washington, DC: Center on Education Policy.

- Kohn, A. (2010). How to create nonreaders: Reflections on motivation, learning, and sharing power. *English Journal*, 100(1), 16-22.
- Lamb, A., & Johnson, L. (2013). Social studies in the spotlight: Digital collections, primary sources, and the common core. *Teacher Librarian*, 41(1), 62-66.
- Larson, M, R. (2012). Will CCSSM matter in ten years? : Reflect and discuss. *Teaching Children Mathematics*, 19(2). 108-115.
- Lee, J., & Swan, K. (2013). Is the Common Core good for social studies? Yes, but.... *Social Education*, 77(6), 327-330.
- Loveless, T. (2012). The Common Core initiatives: What are the chances of success? *Educational Leadership*, 70(4), 60-63.
- Marzano, R. J., Yanoski, D. C., Hoegh, J. K., & Simms, J. A. (2013). *Using Common Core Standards to enhance classroom instruction and assessment*. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research Laboratory.
- Marzano, R. J. (2013a). *The art and science of teaching the Common Core State Standards*. Learning Services Marzano Center Teacher and Leader Evaluation. Retrieved from http://www.marzano-center.com/files/Robert_Marzano_Common_Core_handout_20130604.pdf.
- Marzano, R. J. (2013b). Don't get buried under Common Core State Standards. *Center Education Continuous Educator Growth A Publication of Learning Services*, 3(1), 3-4.
- Marzano, R.J., & Heflebower, T. (2012). *Teaching and assessing 21st century skills*. Bloomington, IN: Marzano Research Laboratory.

- Marzano, R. J., & Haystead, M. W. (2008). *Making standards useful in the classroom*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum and Development.
- Marzano, R. J. (2007). *The art and science of teaching: A comprehensive framework for effective instruction*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum and Development.
- Mathis, W. J. (2010). *The "Common Core" Standards initiative: An effective reform tool?* Boulder, CO: National Educational Policy Center. Retrieved from <http://epicpolicy.org/publication/common-core-standards>.
- McGrory, K. (2014, September 7). Debate over Common Core school standards presents political balancing act for Gov. Rick Scott. *Miami Herald*. Retrieved from <http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/education/article1990542.html>.
- McLaughlin, M. W., & Shepard, L. A. (1995). *Improving education through standards-based reform*. Stanford, CA: National Academy of Education.
- McTighe, J. & Wiggins, G. (2013). From Common Core Standards to curriculum. Five big ideas. *The New Hampshire Journal of Education*. 25-31. Retrieved from [http://nhascd.net/sites/default/files/pdf/NHJE_pages_2013\(1\).pdf#page=25](http://nhascd.net/sites/default/files/pdf/NHJE_pages_2013(1).pdf#page=25).
- National Council of Social Studies. (2009). *2009 NCSS house of delegates resolutions*. Retrieved from http://www.socialstudies.org/about/2009_ncss_house_of_delegates_resolutions.

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, The Council of Chief State School Officers (2010). *Common Core State Standards for english language arts & literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects*. Washington D.C.: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers.

National Governors Association, The Council of Chief State School Officers, and Achieve, INC. (2008). *Benchmarking for success: Ensuring U.S. students receive a world-class education*. Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/media/benchmarking%20for%20success%20dec%202008%20final.pdf>.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, Pub L. No. 107-110, &115, Stat. 1425 (2002).

Office of the Press Secretary. (2010, February 22) President Obama calls for new steps to prepare America's children for success in college and careers. Washington, DC: The White House. Retrieved March 3, 2010, from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/president-obama-calls-new-steps-prepare-america-s-children-success-college-and-care>.

O'Connor, J. (2014, January 13). Florida department of education recommends standards changes. *State Impact*. Retrieved from <http://stateimpact.npr.org/florida/2014/01/13/florida-department-of-education-recommends-standards-changes/>.

Ohler, J. (2013). The uncommon core. *Educational Leadership*, 70(5), 42-46.

- Patton, M. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Services Research, 34*(5), 1189-1208.
- Porter, R. E., Fusarelli, L. D., & Fusarelli, B. C. (2015). Implementing the Common Core: How Educators Interpret Curriculum Reform. *Educational Policy, 29*(1), 111-139.
- Porter, A., McMaken, J., Hwang, J. & Yang, R. (2011). Common Core Standards: the new U.S. intended curriculum. *Educational Researcher, 40*(3), 103-116.
- Ravitch, D. (1995). *National standards in American education: A citizen's guide*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Ravitch, D. (1996). The case for national standards and assessments. *The Clearing House, 69*(3), 134-135.
- Ravitch, D. (2011). *The death and life of the great American school system: How testing and choice are undermining education*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ross, E. W. (2006). The struggle for the social studies curriculum. In E. W. Ross (Ed.), *The social studies curriculum: Purposes, problems, and possibilities*. (pp. 17-26). New York: State University of New York Press.
- Rothman, R. (2012a). A Common Core of readiness. *Educational Leadership, 69*(7), 10-15.
- Rothman, R. (2012b). Nine ways the Common Core will change classroom practice. *Harvard Education Letter, 28*(4).
- Rothman, R. (2012c). Putting the pieces in place. *Educational Leadership, 70*(4), 18-22.

- Savage, B. (2014, January 14). Gov. Rick Scott reveals proposed changes to Common Core Standards. *News 13*. Retrieved from http://mynews13.com/content/news/cfnews13/news/article.html/content/news/articles/cfn/2014/1/14/gov_scott_reveals_ch.html.
- Sawch, D., Villanueva, A., & Choo, S. (2013). The Common Core and its chances. *Educational Leadership*, 70(6), 95.
- Sawchuk, S. (2012). Common standards present new frontier for teacher learning. *Education Week*, 32(1), 4-6.
- Schmidt, W. H. & Burroughs, N. A. (2012). How the Common Core boosts quality & equality. *Educational Leadership*, 70(4), 54-58.
- Seidman, I. (1998). *Interviewing as qualitative research*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Shanahan, T. (2012). The Common Core ate my baby. *Educational Leadership*, 70(4), 11-16.
- Shaver, J. P. (1979). The usefulness of educational research in curricular/ instructional decision making in social studies. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 7(3), 21-46.
- Solochek, J. S. (2014, May 23). 'Common Core is out,' Gov. Rick Scott says. *Tampa Bay Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.tampabay.com/blogs/gradebook/common-core-is-out-gov-rick-scott-says/2181165>.
- Stahl, J. R. (1994). *Expectations of excellence: Curriculum standards for social studies-forward*. Silver Spring, MD: National Council for the Social Studies. Retrieved at <http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/foreword>.
- Stake, E. R. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.

- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- The National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk*. Washington, D.C.: US Department of Education.
- Thornton, S. (2014). Hidden curriculum. In D. Phillips (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of educational theory and philosophy*. (pp. 384-385). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483346229.n165>.
- Thornton, S. (2008). Continuity and change in social studies curriculum. In L. Levstik C. Tyson (Ed.), *Handbook of research in social studies research*. (pp. 15-31). New York: Routledge.
- Thornton, S. (2005). *Teaching social studies that matters: Curriculum for active learning*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Thornton, S. (1994). Perspectives on reflective practice in social studies education. In E. W. Ross, *Reflective Practice in Social Studies*. (pp. 5-11). Washington, DC: National Council of Social Studies.
- Thornton, S. (1991). Teacher as curricular-instructional gatekeeper in social studies. In J. Shaver (Ed.), *Handbook of research on social studies teaching and learning*. (pp. 237-248). New York: Macmillan.
- Thornton, S. (1989, March). Aspiration and practice: teacher as curricular-instructional gatekeeper in social studies. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA.
- Thornton, S. J., & Wenger, R. N. (1989, March). *Geography in elementary social studies classrooms*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA.

- Tienken, C. H. (2008). Rankings of international achievement test performance and economic strength: Correlation or conjecture? *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, 3(4), 1–15.
- Tobin, T. (2014, January 26). Understanding the Common Core Standards. *Tampa Bay Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.tampabay.com/news/education/k12/understanding-the-common-core-state-standards/2134517>.
- Tomlinson, C. (2012). One to grow on. *Educational Leadership*, 70(4), 90-91.
- Troia, G. A., & Olinghouse, N. G. (2013). The Common Core State Standards and evidence-based educational practices: The case of writing. *School Psychology Review*, 42(3), 343-357.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2009). *Race to top*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/factsheet.html>.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2001). *Executive summary*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/overview/intro/execsumm.html>.
- Van Hover, S. (2008). 19 The professional development of social studies teachers. *Handbook of research in social studies education*, 352-372
- Vogler, K. E., & Virtue, D. (2007). "Just the facts, ma'am": Teaching social studies in the era of standards and high-stakes testing. *Social Studies*, 98(2), 54-58.
- Williams, J. P. (2014). Who is fighting for Common Core? *U.S. News Digital Weekly*, 6(9), 6.
- Wixson, K.K., Dutro, E., & Athan, R.G. (2003). The challenge of developing content standards. *Review of Research in Education*, 27, 69-107.

- Wong, K. K., Guthrie, J. W., & Harris, D. N. (2014). *A Nation at Risk. [electronic resource] : A 20-year reappraisal. A special issue of the peabody Journal of Education*. Hoboken : Taylor and Francis, 2014.
- Yin, R. K. (2011). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.
- Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Chart Describing the Differences Between the NGSSS and the CCSS

Unit of Study/Grade	NGSSS	ELA History/Social Studies CCSS
<p>Foundations of History/6th</p> <p>This unit will focus on ancient Sumer as the first civilization to embody all characteristics of a civilization and left a legacy seen today.</p>	<p><u>SS.6.W.2.3:</u> Identify the characteristics of a civilization.</p> <p><u>SS.6.W.2.4:</u> Compare the economic, political, social and religious institutions of ancient river civilizations.</p> <p><u>SS.6.W.2.7:</u> Summarize the important achievements of Mesopotamian civilization.</p> <p><u>SS.6.W.2.8:</u> Determine the impact of key figures from ancient Mesopotamian civilizations.</p> <p><u>SS.6.W.3.1:</u> Analyze the cultural impact of the Phoenicians had on the Mediterranean world with regard to colonization (Carthage), exploration, maritime commerce (purple dye, tin) and written communication (alphabet).</p>	<p><u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6:</u> Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6--8.7:</u> Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.1:</u> Introduce claim(s) about a topic or issue, acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically. Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data and evidence that demonstrate an understanding of the topic or text, using credible sources. Use precise language and domain specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.</p>

<p>Citizenship/7th</p> <p>Students will understand the shared principles, rights, and responsibilities of U.S. citizens and recognize the significant interdependence between citizens their governments as well as explain the obligations of citizens in society.</p>	<p><u>SS.7.C.2.1:</u> Define the term "citizen," and identify legal means of becoming a United States citizen.</p> <p><u>SS.7.C.2.2:</u> Evaluate the obligations citizens have to obey laws, pay taxes, defend the nation, and serve on juries.</p> <p><u>SS.7.C.1.9:</u> Define the rule of law and recognize its influence on the development of the American legal, political, and governmental systems.</p>	<p><u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.3:</u> Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.4:</u> Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.</p>
<p>Colonization/8th Grade</p> <p>How did European Colonization of North America play a part in the founding of the United States?</p>	<p><u>SS.8.A.2.1:</u> Compare the relationships among the British, French, Spanish, and Dutch in their struggle for colonization of North America.</p> <p><u>SS.8.A.2.5:</u> Discuss the impact of colonial settlement on Native American populations.</p> <p><u>SS.8.A.2.2:</u> Describe the Characteristics of</p>	<p><u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1:</u> Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.5:</u> Describe how a text presents information (e.g., sequentially, comparatively, causally).</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.8:</u> Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.</p> <p><u>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.1a:</u> Write arguments focused on discipline-specific content.</p>

	<p>the New England, Middle, and Southern Colonies.</p> <p><u>SS.8.A.2.3:</u> Differentiate economic systems of New England, Middle and Southern Colonies including indentured servants and slaves as labor sources.</p> <p><u>SS.8.A.2.4:</u> Identify the Impact of key Colonial figures on the economic, political, and Social development of the colonies.</p> <p><u>SS.8.A.2.7:</u> Describe the contributions of Key groups (Africans, Native Americans, women, and children) to the society and culture of colonial America.</p> <p><u>SS.8.A.2.6:</u> Examine the causes, course, and consequences of the French and Indian War.</p>	
--	---	--

Appendix B: IRB Letter of Approval



RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND COMPLIANCE
Institutional Review Boards, FWA No. 00001669
12901 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., MDC035 • Tampa, FL 33612-4799
(813) 974-5638 • FAX (813) 974-7091

October 29, 2014

Tracy Tilotta
Teaching and Learning
Tampa, FL 33612

RE: **Expedited Approval for Initial Review**

IRB#: Pro00019520

Title: The Common Core State Standards: The Effects on the Instructional Gatekeeping of
Middle School Social Studies Teachers

Study Approval Period: 10/27/2014 to 10/27/2015

Dear Ms. Tilotta:

On 10/27/2014, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and **APPROVED** the above application and all documents outlined below.

Approved Item(s):

Protocol Document(s):

[Tilotta_USF IRB Protocol.docx](#)

Please note you will not be able to conduct any research activities until all letters of support are approved, eg, Pasco County School District thru an Amendment.

Consent/Assent Document(s)*:

[Tilotta_InformedConsent.docx.pdf](#)

*Please use only the official IRB stamped informed consent/assent document(s) found under the "Attachments" tab. Please note, these consent/assent document(s) are only valid during the approval period indicated at the top of the form(s).

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) present no more than minimal risk to human subjects, and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45CFR46.110 and 21 CFR

56.110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review category:

- (5) Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected, or will be collected solely for nonresearch purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnosis).
- (6) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
- (7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,



Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Vice Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board

Appendix C: Email Script for Recruiting Participants

Dear _____,

I am a doctoral candidate in Social Science Education at the University of South Florida in Tampa, Florida. I am pursuing my doctorate by conducting research on the possible impacts the Common Core Standards (CCSS) have on the instructional decision-making by middle school social studies teachers choose to use in their classrooms. Your participation is requested in this research (PRO# 19520). I would like to ask you about the types of instructional strategies you plan for and use due to the implementation of the CCSS. I will also be asking you about any successes and/or challenges you have experienced while implementing the CCSS. As compensation for your time and participation in the study, you will receive a \$10 Publix gift card at the completion of each interview and a \$10 Publix gift card for the verification of each transcribed interview. During the interviews, I will also provide some refreshments. With your permission the interviews will be taped and transcribed.

Participation in the study will require two one-hour interviews and approximately one hour of verifying the accuracy of the transcripts. To maintain confidentiality, you will be given a pseudonym in all transcriptions and you will not be identified by name on the tape. Also, to maintain confidentiality, Thomas E. Weightman Middle School (TEWMS) will also be given a pseudonym. Transcription software and/or a professional transcriptionist will be used to transcribe the audio files. The audio files will be locked at my house. Each participant will be offered a copy of their audio files and a copy of their transcription. The participants and I will be the only ones with access to the audio files. The master audio file will remain in my possession and will be destroyed five years after the publication of the dissertation.

The two interviews will be arranged at a location of your convenience. The first interview will occur in spring (January) 2015 and the second interview will take place later that spring (March) 2015. Transcripts for the first interview will be made available for participant review before the second interview.

I appreciate your consideration of my request. Please contact me within a week at the email or phone number listed below if you would like to participate in this voluntary research.

Sincerely,

Tracy R. Tilotta.
Doctoral Candidate
Social Science Education
University of South Florida

4202 E. Fowler Avenue
EDU 162
Tampa, FL 33620
trilott@mail.usf.edu
ph 813.230-0333

Appendix D: Proposed Timeline

Task	Timeline
Submit IRB review application	October, 2014
Submit Pasco research application	November, 2014
USF Proposal hearing and approval	December, 2014
Identify two colleagues to operate as my peer review for triangulation	December, 2014
Emails sent to perspective participants, inviting them to participate in the study (see Appendix B)	December, 2014
Identify the participants based on responses to emails	Late December, 2014
Contact the participants by email requesting the first interview	Late December, 2014
Attend the first interviews based on participants' time and location requests. Secure written consent (see Appendix C)	January, 2015
Transcribe the interviews from audio recording to written data	Late January, 2015
Return the transcription to the participants to complete member checks and verify accuracy	Early February, 2015
Receive member check feedback and adjust the transcripts accordingly	Early February, 2015

Review the written data alone, analyzing for themes and code data	February, 2015
Meet with the peer group for triangulation and peer coding	February, 2015
Review the peer coding, identifying new themes	Late February, 2015
Contact participants requesting the 2 nd interview, requesting they bring artifacts	Late February, 2015
Conduct the second interview with participants and collect volunteered artifact materials	Early March, 2015
Transcribe the second interviews from audio recording to written data and copy any artifact materials.	March, 2015
Return the second transcription and any artifact materials to the participants to complete member checks and verify accuracy	Early April, 2015
Receive member check feedback and adjust the second interview transcripts accordingly	Early April, 2015
Review the written data and artifact material, analyzing for themes with codes determined from interview #1 analysis, along with any new codes and themes identified by the peer review group	April, 2015
Meet with peer group for triangulation and peer coding of	April, 2015

interview two and artifact material	
Begin writing Chapters 4 and 5	May, 2015
Chapter 4 – Presentation of Data Completed	August, 2015
Chapter 5 – Analysis and Summary Completed	September, 2015
Manuscript Format Check	September, 2015
Dissertation Defense	Late October, 2015

Appendix E: Informed Consent



Informed Consent to Participate in Research Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study PRO# 19520

You are being asked to take part in a research study. Research studies include only people who choose to take part. This document is called an informed consent form. Please read this information carefully and take your time making your decision. Ask the researcher or study staff to discuss this consent form with you, please ask him/her to explain any words or information you do not clearly understand. We encourage you to talk with your family and friends before you decide to take part in this research study. The nature of the study, risks, inconveniences, discomforts, and other important information about the study are listed below. Participation is voluntary and that the subject may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled.

We are asking you to take part in a research study called: *The Common Core State Standards: The Possible Affects on the Instructional Gatekeeping of the Middle School Social Studies Teacher*

The person who is in charge of this research study is Tracy R. Tilotta. This person is called the Principal Investigator. She is being guided in this research by Dr. Barbara Cruz. Ms. Tilotta can be contacted at (813) 230-0333 or trtilott@mail.usf.edu. Dr. Cruz can be contacted at (813) 974-2817 or bcruz@usf.edu

The two research interviews will be conducted at a location of your convenience.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine how the recently adopted Common Core State Standards affects the types of instructional decision-making middle school social studies teachers engage in.

This study is being conducted by a graduate student for completion of a doctoral dissertation.

Study Procedures

You are being asked to participate because you are a middle school social studies teacher.

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in two one-hour semi-structured open-ended interviews and approximately one hour of verifying transcripts.
- With your permission the interviews will be taped and transcribed. To maintain confidentiality, you will be given a pseudonym in all transcriptions and you will not be identified by name on the tape. Also to maintain confidentiality, Thomas E. Weightman Middle School (TEWMS) will also be given a pseudonym. Transcription software and/or a professional transcriptionist may be used to transcribe the audio files.
- The audio files will be locked in Ms. Tilotta's home. Each participant will be offered a copy of their own audio files and a copy of their own transcription. The participants and principle investigator will be the only ones with access to the audio files. The master audio file will remain in Ms. Tilotta's possession and will be destroyed five years after the publication of the dissertation.
- The two interviews will be arranged at a location of the participants' convenience. The first interview will occur in spring 2015 (January) and the second interview will take place later that spring 2015 (March).
- Transcripts for the first interview will be made available for participant review before the second interview.
- At the end of the first interview the participant will be asked to bring teacher artifacts to the second face-to-face interview (lesson plans, unit plans, their planning calendars, student work, etc.). Participants will be instructed to white out any student and/or school identifiers on any artifact they bring to the second interview.

Total Number of Participants

About six individuals will take part in this study.

Alternatives

You do not have to participate in this research study.

Benefits

We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study.

Risks or Discomfort

This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. There are no known additional risks to those who take part in this study.

Compensation

You will be paid a \$10.00 Publix gift card at the completion of each interview and a \$10.00 Publix gift card for the verification of each transcribed interview. During the interviews, refreshments will be provided by Tracy R. Tilotta.

Cost

There will be no additional costs to you as a result of being in this study.

Confidentiality

Certain people may need to see your transcripts. By law, anyone who looks at your transcripts must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these transcripts are: The research team, including the Principal Investigator and all other research staff. Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your transcripts. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety: This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this study, general questions, or have complaints, concerns or issues you want to discuss with someone outside the research, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638. You may also contact Tracy Tilotta at 813-230-0333.

It is up to you to decide whether you want to take part in this study. If you want to take part, please sign the form, if the following statements are true.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study and I acknowledge I may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. I understand that by signing this form I am agreeing to take part in research. I have received a copy of this form to take with me.

Signature of Person Taking Part in Study

Date

Printed Name of Person Taking Part in Study

Statement of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

I have carefully explained to the person taking part in the study what he or she can expect from their participation. I hereby certify that when this person signs this form, to the best of my knowledge, he/ she understands:

- What the study is about;
- What procedures will be used;
- What the potential benefits might be; and
- What the known risks might be.

I can confirm that this research subject speaks the language that was used to explain this research and is receiving an informed consent form in the appropriate language. Additionally, this subject reads well enough to understand this document or, if not, this person is able to hear and understand when the form is read to him or her. This subject does not have a medical/psychological problem that would compromise comprehension and therefore makes it hard to understand what is being explained and can, therefore, give legally effective informed consent. This subject is not under any type of anesthesia or analgesic that may cloud their judgment or make it hard to understand what is being explained and, therefore, can be considered competent to give informed consent.

Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Date

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Informed Consent

Appendix F: Research Questions Crosswalk

Research Questions & Interviewer Protocol

Crosswalk

In this chart, the research questions guiding the study are shown across the top row. The interview protocol items which seek to address each research question are shown underneath, in the appropriate column.

RQ#1: To what extent does the CCSS influence middle school social studies teachers' decision making in the types of instructional strategies they choose to use in their classroom?	RQ#2: What specific types of instructional strategies do middle school social studies teachers report to use when implementing the CCSS?	RQ#3: Do middle school social studies teachers feel adequately prepared to make decisions regarding the types of instructional strategies they choose to use to implement the CCSS in their classrooms?	RQ#4: What instructional successes do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS in their classroom?	RQ#5: What challenges do middle school social studies teachers experience when implementing the CCSS in their classroom?
Interview 1: As a practicing social studies teacher, what does the CCSS mean to you?	Interview 2: What types of instructional strategies do you use while implementing the CCSS? (Presentation of artifacts.)	Interview 1: Have you attended any school- or district-based trainings and/or staff development workshops that have helped you understand the CCSS? If so, please describe them.	Interview 2: Using the following scale, to what extent do you feel you have been successful in implementing the CCSS? (To very great extent, To great extent, To some extent, To little extent, to very little extent)	Interview 2: Using the following scale, to what extent do you feel you have been challenged in implementing the CCSS? (To very great extent, To great extent, To some extent, To little extent, to very little extent)

<p>Interview 1: Do you purposefully plan in order to address the CCSS into your instruction?</p>	<p>Interview 2: Can you describe a learning activity you used with students while implementing the CCSS? (Presentation of artifacts.)</p>	<p>Interview #1: Have you attended any school- or district-based trainings and/or staff developments that have helped you implement the CCSS?</p>	<p>Interview 2: What have been some of the successes you have been faced with when implementing the CCSS?</p>	<p>Interview 2: What have been some of the challenges you have been faced with when implementing the CCSS?</p>
<p>Interview 1: What are your personal beliefs regarding the CCSS?</p>		<p>Interview 1: Does your school have any systems in place to support your needs to effectively plan instructional strategies that will help you implement the CCSS? If so, please describe.</p>		
<p>Interview 2: To what extent do you feel the CCSS play a role when deciding what instructional strategies you choose to use in the classroom?</p>		<p>Interview 1: Do you feel you are given enough planning time to effectively infuse the CCSS into your curriculum?</p>		
<p>Interview 2: Have you made any major instructional changes since the</p>		<p>Interview 1: Do you feel you are provided with enough resources to effectively</p>		

<p>mandated implementation of the CCSS? If so, what are they? Please describe.</p>		<p>infuse the CCSS into your curriculum?</p>		
<p>Interview 2: To what extent do you feel the CCSS has impacted your decision making within your classroom?</p>		<p>Interview 1: Up until his point do you feel you have been adequately trained in the types of instructional strategies that should be used to effectively implement the CCSS in your classroom?</p>		
<p>Interview 2: What informed your decision to select these specific instructional strategies?</p>				

Appendix G: Semi-Structured Interview #1 Protocol

Before each interview I will remind participants of their anonymity and the purpose of the study (for academic, non-work related purposes). I will also remind participants of the voluntary nature of the process, their option to recuse themselves, the option to pass on a question and possibly return later, and their ability to review the transcripts and make corrections if needed.

1. What is your age?
2. What ethnicity do you most identify with?
3. In what subjects and grade levels is your teaching certification?
4. How long have you been a teacher?
5. How long have you been teaching middle school social studies?
6. What grade do you currently teach?
7. How long have you been exposed to the CCSS?
8. As a practicing social studies teacher what does the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) mean to you?
9. What are your personal beliefs regarding the CCSS?
10. Do you purposefully plan in order to address the CCSS into your instruction?
11. Have you attended any school- or district-based trainings and/ or staff developments workshops that have helped you understand the CCSS? If so, please describe them.
12. Have you attended any school- or district-based trainings and/ or staff developments that have helped you implement the CCSS? If so, please describe them.
13. Does your school have any systems in place to support your needs to effectively plan instructional strategies that will help you implement the CCSS? If so please describe.
14. Do you feel you are given enough planning time to effectively infuse the CCSS into your curriculum?
15. Do you feel you are provided with enough resources to effectively infuse the CCSS into your curriculum?
16. Up until his point do you feel you have been adequately trained in the types of instructional strategies that should be used to effectively implement the CCSS in your classroom?
17. Before we conclude this interview is there anything else you would like to add?

At the conclusion of this interview participants will be reminded to bring artifacts to our next face-to-face interview. The artifacts may be a lesson plan, unit plan, their planning calendars, student work, or other documents that address their curricular and instructional planning and practices. Participants will be instructed to white out all student and/or school identifiers on all

artifacts brought to the next face-to-face interview. These artifacts will assist participants in their explanation and discussion with me in regards to how the CCSS has affected the instructional strategies they use in their classrooms.

Appendix H: Semi-Structured Interview #2 Protocol

Before each interview I will remind participants of their anonymity and the purpose of the study (for academic, non-work related purposes). I will also remind participants of the voluntary nature of the process, their option to recuse themselves, the option to pass on a question and possibly return later, and their ability to review the transcripts and make corrections if needed.

1. Now that you've had an opportunity to review the transcripts for the first interview, would you like to elaborate on any of your responses from the first interview?
2. To what extent do you feel the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) play a role when deciding what instructional strategies you choose to use in the classroom?
3. What types of instructional strategies do you use while implementing the CCSS? You were asked to bring artifacts to this interview (lesson plans, unit plans, planning calendars, student work, etc.). Please refer to your artifacts to help you describe to me the types of instructional strategies you use to help implement the CCSS.
4. What informed your decision to select these specific instructional strategies?
5. Can you describe a learning activity you used with students while implementing the CCSS?
6. Have you made any major instructional changes since the mandated implementation of the CCSS? If so, what are they? Please describe.
7. To what extent do you feel the CCSS has impacted your decision making within your classroom?
8. Using the following scale, to what extent do you feel you have been successful in implementing the CCSS?
(To very great extent, To great extent, To some extent, To little extent, To very little extent)
9. What have been some of the successes you have had when implementing the CCSS?
10. Using the following scale, to what extent do you feel you have been challenged in implementing the CCSS?
(To very great extent, To great extent, To some extent, To little extent, To very little extent)
11. What have been some of the challenges you have been faced with when implementing the CCSS?
12. Before we conclude this interview is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix I: Student Reflect and Predict Form

Name: Norman ... Period: 3 Date: 3/25/15

Appendix
under Student
Improvement.

Reflect and Predict

Reflect:

After playing the Kahoot review game, how did you do? Did you remember as much as you thought you would? In the space below, write a paragraph **summarizing** what you have learned about American History so far this year.

on the Kahoot

I didn't do as well as I wanted to. There was a couple of facts that I forgot. I still ~~remember~~ remembered Jefferson versus Hamilton and their differences. I also learned about North versus South and slavery. Blacks weren't kept as slaves but were still segregated and still weren't all that free.

Thanks to this class I have improved on writing essays as well. It didn't seem as hard when I broke it down. It was a lot easier to write an essay, than before.