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Examining Teachers' Perceptions and Adaptations Related to the First-Year of Implementation of the Common Core State Standards in a Rural Elementary School in Central Illinois

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

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Abstract

This study examined the latest mandated government policy of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), which fully took effect during the 2014-2015 school year. The study sought to look at these changes through the eyes of a group of elementary teachers in rural Illinois as they worked with and through these policy mandates during their initial year of implementation.

The study was conducted over the course of the 2014-2015 school year. Data were gathered through a three interview sequence, site visits and the administration of the SOCQ 75 instrument before and at the conclusion of the school year. All three data sources were triangulated to see if they indicated the same perceptions.

The findings were that in this district the teachers were not experiencing negative perceptions of the CCSS, in fact it was quite the opposite. The teachers were in favor of the new standards. They generally felt they were vastly superior to the old Illinois Learning Standards and preferred to work with them. In comparison to the positive perceptions of the CCSS, the perceptions of PARCC were overwhelmingly negative. As far down as Pre-K the teachers felt that the PARCC was an overbearing influence on not only what they teach, but the emphasis on PARCC created undue stress on the teachers, and is a negative influence on the atmosphere of the school.

As mentioned previously, the focus of this study were the perceptions of teachers concerning both the CCSS and PARCC. During the course of the study themes emerged that warrant further research. The most notable is the role that the administrators in the district played in the adoption of the CCSS in the district. The teachers indicated that the administrators in the district made the adoption of the CCSS easy for them.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge many individuals, both in Arkansas and in Illinois, without whose help this dissertation would not have been possible.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the school district and teachers that allowed me into their classrooms and building over the course of the 2014-2015 school year. Not only were they willing to let me become a member of their educational community, they all took their own time to be observed, interviewed and, answer e-mails and truly let me into their world and shared their experiences with me. They collectively provided me with more insight than I could have ever anticipated.

Next, I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee who have been unbelievably helpful. Dr. Goering has provided me with numerous articles and insight that has been extremely valuable during my research and study. Dr. Holt is the first person I talked to at the University of Arkansas when I was considering my graduate school options in the fall of 2011. Before I even applied, he took the time to tell me about the program and he is the main reason I applied to and decided to attend the University of Arkansas. I am so thankful he was willing to work with me and encourage me to apply to the University of Arkansas.

Finally, I want to express my extreme gratitude to Dr. Bengston for guiding me through the entire process. If it had not been for his encouragement and guidance I do not know if I ever would have made it through the program, let alone have written this dissertation. I have learned more about not just research but being a "Steward of the Profession" than I can possibly detail here. These skills will make me a better professional for the rest of my career, and the value of that is incalculable.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. Without them, I never would have even considered a journey like this, let alone have been able to complete it.

First is my baby girl Anna. Right now you are too young to read this, but one of these days you will hear stories about how many hours you spent sitting at the kitchen table with me doing your "homework", and by homework I mean coloring, while I was coding, typing, editing and researching. Watching you, and seeing you smile, made me realize how important what I was doing was, and inspired me to push on and finish.

Finally, if it was not for my wife, Jamie, none of this would have been possible. Every time that things got tough, or I started talking about quitting, you were there to pick me back up and assure me that I had it in me. You inspire me every day, and you make me the luckiest person in the world.

I did all of this for both of you, and it never would have been possible without you. Thank you so much for everything you have done, and continue to do.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

It is important to remember that "The *United States Constitution does not clearly authorize the federal government to control and form the content of education*" (Miller, 1995, p. 19). Despite that fact, over the last 60 years there has been an increasing amount of involvement of the federal government in the field of education. Over that time there has been a series of four major events, each evoking an environment of *panic* and governmental interjection that leads the public and Congress to act in ways that under normal circumstances would not be seen as "necessary and proper." This study examined the latest mandated government policy of the Common Core State Standards and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, which fully took effect during the 2014-2015 school year. The study sought to look at these changes through the eyes of a group of elementary teachers in rural Illinois as they worked with and through these policy mandates during their initial year of implementation.

The first of a series of events influencing federal involvement in education was the Soviet Union launching the first man made satellite, Sputnik I, into orbit in 1957. This event is often seen as what brought the federal government into education. The truth is that the movement for federal involvement in education began after the Second World War. The only problem was that the parties involved could not come to a consensus about what exactly was appropriate for the federal government to do, while not jeopardizing the local control of schooling (Dow, 1991). After the launch of Sputnik, the public started hearing statements such as "This failure is of concern not only to the public administrator and the professional educator: it directly affects every citizen and the national welfare" (The Educational Policies Commission, 1964, p. 29) and that "A huge missile gap existed between the Soviet Union and the United States" (Zhao, 2009,

p. 20). Statements such as these caused a national panic of losing outer space to the communists, and a general feel of inferiority, as described by Killian's (1977) observance, "As it beeped in the sky, Sputnik I created a crisis of confidence that swept the country like a windblown forest fire" (p. 7). This is the historical context in which Congress increased spending for education in math, the sciences and modern languages, through the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 (Tindall & Shi, 1999).

The reality of the situation was that there was not a crisis. The United States was not behind the Soviet Union in technological advancement. The fact was that "there was no doubt that the Redstone, had it been used, could have orbited a satellite a year or more ago" (Goodpaster, 1957, para. 2). However, the crisis was used as a rationale for the federal government involving itself with public education. As Tienken and Orlich (2013) posit, "Remember that the federal government had very little influence on the K-12 curriculum at that time and the idea of federal incursions into the classrooms was not welcomed" (p. 23). During this time we see the idea articulated by Tienken and Orlich began to change. Various organizations began to advocate for policy changes that would enter the federal government further into the world of education. "The policy change relates to the amount and type of federal participation in the support of education" (The Educational Policies Commission, 1964, p. 29).

The second big event was the highly publicized report titled *A Nation at Risk. A Nation at Risk* was a report that was commissioned by Secretary of Education T. H. Bell. This work is remembered for the picture it painted about the state of public education in America. The opening of *A Nation at Risk* contained the quote "the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" (Gardner et al., 1983, p. 5) and "If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to

impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war" (p. 5) One of the major policy recommendations that came of out *A Nation at Risk* was to "recommended that all states adopt curricular standards and increased standardized testing" (Shelly, 2013, p. 122). The justification for this conclusion was the dire rhetoric that was used to paint a less than favorable picture of public school system in America, and open the door to new policy formation in wake of the "crisis" that was being reported.

At the time the report was issued, it made headlines. There were "28 articles in the Washington Post alone" (Bracey, 2003, para. 2). This attention brought education in the United States to the front of the consciousness of the American people. No matter what the actual facts or situation in their local school, people only heard the headlines about the failings of the American school system. The focus dwelled only on the negative:

> Above all, the reform reports reinforced the belief, first announced in *A Nation at Risk*, that American education is in deep CRISIS. Moreover, the education crisis message has since been repeated endlessly by leaders in both government and industry and has been embraced by a host of journalists, legislators, educators and other concerned Americans. (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p. 143)

Like the launching of Sputnik, where the crisis rhetoric began, it was brought back 16 years later. The difference is that this time it was not pressure exerted by external factors. This "crisis" was completely organic and devised by internal factors.

Upon scrutiny, the *Nation at Risk* report does not hold up as quality research. Tienken and Orlich (2013) charged, "a *Nation at Risk* was an intellectually vapid and data challenged piece of propaganda" (p. 31). The intellectual emptiness of *A Nation at Risk* was exposed by a study, which has become to be known as *The Sandia Report*. This report was completed in 1990 but took three years to be published because it was "suppressed by then deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of Education under President George H. W. Bush, former Xerox CEP Dave

Kearns" (Tienken & Orlich, 2013, p. 33). During this time, the authors of *The Sandia Report* report that:

> As our work unfolded, we began to solicit feedback from various peer groups in New Mexico and throughout the nation. After a limited release of the draft in the summer of 1991, we found ourselves to be a target for various groups – both those who found our observations to be in conflict with their particular views, as well as those who grasped our findings as "proof" to support their own theses. (Carson, Huelskamp, & Woodall, 1992, p. 259)

This report actually looked at the claims of *A Nation at Risk* and did the statistical work to see if the claims that were being made stood up to scrutiny. Here are some of Carson et al's. (1992) main findings:

- When the graduation rate is calculated to include GED students, it is over 85%. That is consistent with the U.S. Census data. The data presented by *A Nation At Risk* also included all 17 year olds, including recent immigrants that had never attended at day of school in the United States.

- "Approximately one in four persons in the 25 to 29 year old age group has completed at least a four year college degree. This rate is nearly the same as the U.S. high school graduation rate of the 1930's" (p. 263).

- "White and Asian students were out-performing other students; however the performance gap is slowly closing. These data are available only in the years since 1975. Unfortunately we could not track the trend before that time" (p. 268).

- During the 1980's the number of students pursuing four-year degrees in the Natural Sciences and Engineering increased from the 1960's and then has remained relatively stable.

- "As a percentage of our GNP, U.S. spending is relatively low however, given the size of our GNP it is reasonable to expect some economies of scale resulting in lower average costs" (p. 282).

- "In total expenditures per pupil, U.S. spending is high. Only Switzerland spends more, and Sweden spends roughly the same. This measure is also inadequate because of the relatively high proportions of U.S. special education expenditures" (p. 282).

- Over the past 20 years the United States has produced a higher percentage of technical degrees than other countries.

The Sandia Report questions the credibility of *A Nation at Risk*. Bracey (2003) explained, "The 'data' on education and competitiveness consisted largely of testimonials from Americans who had visited Japanese Schools" (para. 14). Bracey (2003) also makes a quality point concerning the conclusions of *A Nation at Risk* in stating that "the National Commission on Excellence in Education – and many school critics as well – made a mistake that no educated person should: they confused correlation with causation" (para. 14). Unfortunately, yet predictably, the *Sandia Report* had nowhere near the publicity or national profile of *A Nation At Risk.*

After the publication of *A Nation At Risk,* the third major event that shaped public opinion and government policy in public education was the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Again, it was "a time of wide public concern about the state of education" (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011, para. 2). This new program was announced by President George W. Bush three days after taking office in 2001 (Ravitch, 2010). This reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act would bring about far reaching changes in classrooms across the country.

Some of the changes that were introduced included increased accountability, school choice, reading emphasis, "highly qualified" teachers, and school report cards (United States Department of Education, 2002; Editorial Projects in Education Research, 2011). The provision that is commonly heard about is Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). This was the intention that every student would be tested in every grade 3-8 to see if students were making progress. The goal was to have every student at grade level and deemed proficient by the 2013-2014 school year. The interesting part of this legislation is that the states were the ones that were required to set what was considered proficient in their state (Editorial Projects in Education Research, 2011). This flaw in the law "allowed states to claim gains even when there were none" (Ravitch, 2010, p. 101).

While this was a well intended reform, there were some obvious problems that were apparent at the time of adoption but have become more prevalent recently. The 100% proficiency mandate was unobtainable. It sounds like a great goal but there is something that the legislators overlooked. Rothstein (2011) makes the point that:

> NCLB's attempt to require all students to be proficient at a challenging level led to the absurd result that nearly every school in the nation was on a path to be deemed failing by the 2014 deadline. The demand ignored an obvious reality of human nature – there is a distribution of ability among children regardless of background, and no single standard can be challenging for children at all points in that distribution. (para. 9)

NCLB is attempting to take human nature and learning and create a mathematical formula to represent it. Not all students will reach predetermined marks at the same time as their peers. Ravitch (2010) points out the absurdity of this by stating "such a goal has never been reached by any state or nation" (p. 103).

The true consequences of NCLB are being seen across the country. In Illinois 58.2% of the state's 2,054,155 students met or exceeded in all subjects (Illinois Interactive Report Card,

2014). Similarly, out of the 863 school districts in the state, 62 districts, or 7.2% of all districts

made AYP (Illinois Interactive Report Card, 2014). Those numbers are not what were expected

when the law was conceived. The thought was that by this point there would be over 90% of

students meeting or exceeding on the Illinois Scholastic Achievement Test (ISAT) and Prairie

State Achievement Exam (PSAE). The failure of NCLB is summed up by Ravitch (2010) in

saying:

> NCLB was a punitive law based on erroneous assumptions about how to improve
> schools. It assumed that reporting test scores to the public would be an effective lever for
> school reform. It assumed that changes in governance would lead to school
> improvement. It assumed that shaming schools that were unable to lift test scores every
> year – and the people who work in them – would lead to higher scores. It assumed that
> low scores are caused by lazy teachers and lazy principals, who need to be threatened
> with the loss of their job. Perhaps most naively, it assumed that higher test scores on
> standardized tests of basic skills are synonymous with good education. Its assumptions
> were wrong. Testing is not a substitute for curriculum and instruction. Good education
> cannot be achieved by a strategy of testing children, shaming educators, and closing
> schools. (pp. 110-111)

The fourth major event was the formation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

The teacher's perceptions and self-reported adaptation of the implementation of these standards

is the subject of this dissertation. Due to that fact, the details of the origin of the CCSS will be

detailed in the Review of Literature during Chapter Two.

The common thread of all four events is that they came about because of a perceived

crisis that was occurring. Upon close inspection, it becomes apparent that these crises were at

best manufactured, and at worst an out and out fraud being perpetrated to serve a separate

interest. No matter how the CCSS came about, these crises caused major, if not extreme policy

shifts in the world of education. As professionals in that field it is vital to understand the origin

of these shifts in order to prepare for their impact.

Problem Statement

The 2014-2015 school year was the first year that Illinois Elementary students no longer took the ISAT (Illinois Scholastic Aptitude Test) assessment and instead were assessed using the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) assessment. The main reason for this change was due to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards that take effect for the 2014-2015 school year. The ISAT is not aligned to the CCSS and must be replaced as the tool used to assess progress throughout the state. This change will necessitate not only teachers changing the content that they are teaching, but also their methods of instruction and assessment. Teachers are going to potentially be the most important instruments of this change as the ones responsible for implementing these reforms. For that reason it is important to document their perceptions and self-reported adaptations during the first year of implementation.

The CCSS became a subject of debate across the country (Fitzpatrick, 2013; Markell, 2013; Ponnuru 2013; Richards, 2013a; & Strauss, 2013b). Finally, states across the country began to ask "Why?" Why were these standards introduced? Are these that much better than what we already had in place? What is the benefit of having nationalized instead of state standards? In this heated climate, many states, including Illinois, began to implement the CCSS in for the 2014-2015 school year.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to document the perceptions and self-reported changes in practice of teachers as they implement the Common Core State Standards and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers assessment that began with the 2014 school year in Illinois. As stated above, this is the first year that both the CCSS and PARCC were used in the State of Illinois. By recording these initial perceptions and potential

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changes of perceptions over the academic year, may give educators and people who train

educators, such as administrators and college faculty, some insight into the experiences of

practicing educators. This insight into the perceptions of educators might inform how teachers

are prepared and continually developed.

As of August 2015 Illinois has not seen the full-scale controversy over the Common Core

State Standards (CCSS) present in some states. There have been no bills in the legislature to

withdraw from the implementation of the CCSS. The Illinois Education Association (IEA) has

not come out opposing it, and there is no grass roots effort to revert as there are in other states.

The current President of the United States champions these standards. It is hard to foresee a

move where the state of Illinois works to undermine the main educational achievement of a

president from its own state.

As the State of Illinois moved into the next wave of educational accountability and

reform, this yearlong study looks to provide insight into teachers' perceptions of the

implementation of the latest policy components of that reform, the CCSS and PARCC

assessments, during the first full year of their implementation. These potential findings may help

other teachers going forward. By examining the experience of the participants, this study may

inform others going through the same or similar dilemmas.

Research Questions

In order to complete the research project the following research question and sub-

questions were asked:

1. How does the mandated policy of the Common Core State Standards influence teachers

    as evidenced by their experiences?

a. How do teachers perceive the adoption of the Common Core State Standards influencing their professional practice?

b. How does a teacher's educational level and past experiences effect their perceptions of the Common Core State Standards?

These questions helped to further explore the experiences that teachers are undergoing during this year of transition to the CCSS and the PARCC assessments. The research questions are designed to look at the previous experiences that teachers bring with them into the academic year and look at possible connections between those experiences and the teacher's perceptions and self-reported adaptations to the New Illinois Learning Standards.

Overview of Methodology

This was a qualitative study that examined teachers' overall attitudes and perceptions of the Common Core State Standards during the first year of their implementation. This is to be accomplished through a series of three interviews, classroom observations and Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) survey, specifically the Stages of Concern (SoC) questionnaire were utilized at both the start and end of the study to measure any movement in the concern and implementation of the participants.

The first phase included the SoC questionnaire. This questionnaire served as a basis of comparison for later in the year when the identical questionnaire was distributed again to look for movement in the teacher responses and possible stage movement.

The second stage was a three-interview sequence spread out over the school year. The first will ideally occur before Labor Day, the second between Thanksgiving and the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday with the final interview in May of 2015 (see table 3.6). These interviews, along with the observations and SoC survey, provided a means to document the

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teachers' attitudes and perceptions throughout the school year as well as potentially identify any changes in said attitudes and perceptions should they occur.

The remainder of the study was the completion of the interview sequence, site visits and the second SoC questionnaire. The data collection was completed before the end of May 2015.

Rationale and Significance

This study examined the attitudes and perceptions of teachers as they implemented the Common Core State Standards for the first time. Teachers are the individuals who are responsible for the actual instruction that goes on with the students in the classroom. If there is to be a major overhaul of the instructional structure of the schools it is imperative to understand the effect that overhaul has on those that are charged with implementing it. The timing of the study will allow this to happen during the first school year of the new standards and change in student testing.

It is anticipated that through a better understanding of the experiences that teachers are undergoing and an in-depth look at their perceptions, policy makers will be better able to understand the relationship between the decisions that they make and the direct effect that is felt by the teachers who implement those policy decisions. With increased understanding of those experiences, adjustments, if necessary, can be made with in school districts and teacher preparation programs to help teachers become better prepared for the changes that are needed in the new educational environment. These possible adjustments may include, but not limited to, the areas of professional development, in-service training and changes in the course requirements or content needed to become a certified teacher.

Role of the Researcher

While this study was being conducted, the researcher was employed, and had been for the previous six years, as both a teacher and the K-12 principal in a neighboring school district, with similar demographics including size, ethnic make-up and staff numbers. This background will help to provide the context that will enable the observations and interviews to more accurately portray the experiences and perceptions of the teachers involved with the study.

The same experiences that may add extra understanding and context to the study, could potentially be a liability in creating an accurate portrayal of the experiences and perceptions of the teachers in the study. In order to prevent the experiences and context provided from the researcher to influence the findings of this study, procedures are being used to validate the data. This includes relying on multiple data sources (i.e., interviews, observations and SoC questionnaire) to assure that the conclusions that are arrived at are consistent across all data sources.

Researcher Assumptions

I originally approached this study from a Curriculum and Instruction perspective. My original graduate work is in the field and my Master's Degree is in Curriculum and Instruction. In addition, I have extensive background knowledge in all four core subjects. I am licensed to teach Math, Social Science, English Language Arts and Science in grades six through twelve. That requires a minimum of 32 credit hours in each area and passing a content knowledge test for each subject area. I began this study with an extensive knowledge of the main subject areas that will be taught.

Through working as the Elementary, and later K-12, principal in a neighboring school district I have a working knowledge of the area and students that these schools serve. Also

through this experience I have gained additional knowledge of elementary planning, instruction and curriculum. It is anticipated that this background and experience will help to provide additional content to draw from during the interviews, and allow me to provide extensive context during my observations and interviews which will be triangulated with the SoC questionnaire to provide a full picture of the perceptions and experiences of teachers during the first year that they are implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

In my current district, which mirrors the district where the study will be conducted in nearly every respect (e.g., test scores, size, demographics, etc.) the teachers have a superficial knowledge of the CCSS. The majority of the knowledge the teachers have on the topic has come from in-services that have been conducted on site during the first part of the year. Due to the exceptionally fierce weather we encountered this January and February, the in-service days for the spring have been cancelled and converted to full attendance days for the students in order to maximize instructional time for the remainder of the year.

Teachers who were straight out of college and were hired as recently as two years ago stated during the interview process, "Those standards were something they just told us about, we didn't actually learn about them or what they are." Our more recent hires (2013-2014 and for the 2014-2015 school year) have all been knowledgeable in what the CCSS are and had a plan on how to institute them in their classroom. Therefore, there is an assumption that there will be varying degrees of familiarity with the CCSS among the participants.

Definition of Key Terms

Concerns Based Adoption Model – CBAM is a series of instruments that can be used to determine if the changes that are being implemented, or being considered, have the support of the organization, and if they are being fully implemented. There are three different instruments

that can be used: Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SocQ), Levels of Use Questionnaire (LoU) and Innovation Configurations (IC).

Common Core State Standards- CCSS are the set of standards that were established and adopted by states across the nation. They were formed by national organizations and then states were encouraged to adopt them in order to qualify for federal grants under the Race to the Top program.

The Daily 5 – is a literacy strategy that allows students to make individual choices in their learning. Students choose from five activities which are 1) Read to Self, 2) Work on Writing, 3) Read to someone, 4) Listen to Reading, and 5) Word Work. This allows the students to work on activities at their level while the teacher is able to lead group instruction. The core foundations of the program are

- Trusting students

- Providing choice

- Nurturing community

- Creating a sense of urgency

- Building stamina

- Staying out of students' way once routines are established (Boushey & Moser, 2006, p. 18)

Illinois State Board of Education- ISBE This appointed board is responsible for setting educational policy in the State of Illinois. The board is appointed by the governor, and approved by the state senate. Each person is able to be reappointed once for a term limit of two terms.

The Illinois Standards Achievement Test - ISAT was the test that had been given to all students in grades three through eight. The total test consisted of six to eight individual

segments. All grades had three segments of reading and three of math. The fourth and seventh grades have an additional two sections in Science.

Measure of Academic Progress – MAP is a test that is computer based and is given three times a year. The questions are adaptive and the next question will be dependent on the answers the student has given previously. For the last test of the 2014-2015 school year (May 2015) the question bank was replaced with questions based on the Common Core State Standards.

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers - PARCC is a group that is working to establish an assessment that is aligned with the Common Core State Standards. The new assessments are being field tested during the 2013-2014 school year and will become the basis for determining academic progress during the 2014-2015 school year. The states that are members of PARCC are Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee and the District of Columbia.

The Performance Evaluation Reform Act – PERA is an evaluation measure passed by the State of Illinois Legislature that changed the way that teachers and administrators are evaluated in the State of Illinois. Among the changes implemented is that employees would be classified as Excellent, Proficient, Needs Improvement or Unsatisfactory and that student growth would be considered a "significant factor" in evaluations.

The Prairie State Achievement Exam - PSAE was the assessment given to all 11th graders in the state of Illinois. It was a two day test that consisted of the ACT on the first day and the WorkKeys assessment on the second day. The scores earned on the two tests are combined to determine the academic progress of the students. They could have been classified as having Exceeded Standards, Meeting Standards, Below Standards or in Academic Warning.

Race to the top – RTT, the federal grant program that encouraged states to adopt the Common Core State Standards as their educational standards.

Stages of Concern Questionnaire - SoCQ – SoCQ is one portion of the Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM). The other portions include Levels of Use and Innovation Configurations. This model has a mathematical component and can classify individuals in to one of six stages of concern. Based on the results of the survey, the individual can be classified as in one of the following stages of concern: unconcerned, informational, personal, management, consequence, collaboration or refocusing.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Math - STEM- STEM is used to designate courses that involve Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

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Organization of the Dissertation

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This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter One consists of an overview of the problem. Chapter Two will be a thorough review of existing literature consisting of three main topics. Those topics are the history of the Common Core State Standards, how standards influence teachers, and the effectiveness of in-services in changing teacher behavior. Chapter Three will outline the methods this qualitative study will use. Chapter Four will be a presentation and summary of the results. Chapter Five will provide a synthesis of the data gathered as well as and conclusions that may be drawn as well as discussing opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to document the perceptions and self-reported changes in practice of teachers as they implement the Common Core State Standards and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers assessment that began with the 2014 school year in Illinois.

The review of literature focused on four major areas. Those areas are: 1) History of the development, and adoption of the Common Core State Standards; 2) How standards influence teachers; 3) Arguments for and against the Common Core State Standards; and 4) Effectiveness of in-services in changing approaches and practices of teachers, and will conclude with the introduction of the conceptual framework for this dissertation.

The literature review was conducted using a variety of sources including scholarly books, news sources, Google Scholar, EBESCOHOST, JSTOR, ERIC and ProQuest. During the search, the main keywords that were utilized included, but were not limited to: PARCC, Common Core State Standards, standards, in-service, teacher training, Race to the Top, and professional practice of teachers. From the initial search 770 sources were identified as potentially relevant. After further review of those sources, 179 were found to contribute to the review of relevant literature and are included. The categorical breakdown of the initial and included sources are detailed below in table 2.1.

Table 2.1

Summary of Literature reviewed

Source Type	Included in Initial Review	Included in review of literature for dissertation
Acts of a legislative body	Multiple, including entire Illinois School Code	4
Books	72	46
Dissertations	38	11
Executive Summary	7	1
Newspapers	208	52
Papers Presented at Professional Conferences	3	3
Organizational Report	19	5
Personal Communication	6	2
Press Releases	15	3
Professional Journals	86	26
Supreme Court Cases	8	1
Theses	4	1
Web site articles	304	31
Totals	770 + ILCS	179

History of the Development and Adoption of the Common Core State Standards

There has been an ongoing movement toward the adoption of a more standardized national curriculum in America's public schools. There have been three recent major events; the launching of Sputnik, the publication of *A Nation at Risk*, and the passing of No Child Left Behind legislation were detailed in Chapter One. The first section of the literature review will focus on the history, development and passage of the Common Core State Standards.

The movement toward nationwide standards began in 1996 when achieve.org was founded at The National Education Summit (Achieve Inc., 2012a). This organization was founded:

> to convene leaders from across states to come together to share their experiences and tackle common challenges. Importantly, through our networks Achieve convenes not just a cross-section of leaders across states, but also a cross-section of leaders within states,

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including state K-12 and higher education leadership; policymakers from governors' offices, legislatures and state boards of education; district leaders; and third-party advocates from business- and community-based organizations. (Achieve Inc., 2012b, para. 1)

They realized that education was a patchwork of individual state standards and curricula and argued that in order to advance as a nation, we needed a set of national standards that everyone knows and understands. These new standards not only needed to be universal, they also needed to contain what the designers felt was necessary to make the United States competitive in the new global economy.

One of the first works of this organization was to commission the study entitled *Ready or Not: Creating a High School Diploma that Counts* (Achieve Inc., 2004). This was a nation-wide study that involved 2 and 4-year college instructors, high school instructors, and students from across the nation. All stakeholders were supposedly involved in the study so that a full picture of the current state of education at the time could be obtained. This, however, was not the case. There were 27 people in two work groups who wrote the standards. Out of the 27, six worked for ACT, six worked for the College Board, eight worked for Achieve Inc., two were from Student Achievement Partners, and two from America's Choice. There were a total of 3 participants that were not affiliated with one of those groups (Cody, 2013). Also, "ONLY ONE classroom teacher was involved – on the committee to review the math standards" (Cody, 2013, para. 8).

The report produced by this select group identified the following issues that were present in the current educational system that needed to be addressed:

- **Most high school graduates need remedial help in college.** More than 70 percent of graduates enter two and four-year colleges, but at least 28 percent of those students immediately take English or math courses. Transcripts show that 53 percent of students need to take at least one remedial math or English class. The percentages are much higher for poor and minority students.

- **Most college students never attain a degree.** While a majority of high school graduates enter college, fewer than half exit with a degree. Significantly fewer black and Hispanics than whites attain bachelor's degrees. Many factors influence this attrition, but the preparation students receive in high school is the greatest predictor of bachelor's degree attainment – more so than family income or race.
- **Most employers say high school graduates lack basic skills.** More than 60 percent of employers rate high school graduates' skills in grammar, spelling, writing and basic math as "poor" or "fair." One study estimated the cost of remedial training in reading, writing and mathematics to a single state's employers at nearly $40 million a year.
- **Too few high school students take challenging courses.** Most states require high school students to take certain number of courses in English and mathematics, but very few can ensure that the course content reflects the knowledge and skills that colleges and employers demand, such as Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II.
- **Most high school exit exams don't measure what matters to colleges and employers.** Nearly half the states require students to pass exit exams to graduate, but these exams generally assess 8th or 9th grade content, rather than the knowledge and skills that adequately prepare students for credit-bearing college courses or high-performance, high-growth jobs. (Achieve Inc., 2004, p. 2)

This report also made suggestions as to what needed to be implemented to address the above-mentioned problems. The report suggested that the states should:

- Align academic standards in high school with the knowledge and skills required for college and workplace success, using ADP benchmarks as a starting point.
- Back-map standards to create a coherent, focused, grade-by-grade progression from kindergarten through high school graduation.
- Define specific course-taking requirements in English and mathematics for high school graduation (such as Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II rather than simply "three years" of mathematics or "four years" of English, and specify the core content for those courses ensuring that it aligns with ADP benchmarks.
- Insist that all students are held to the same English and mathematics standards, using the same measures, regardless of whether students are in traditional school, charter schools, small theme based schools or other alternative programs.
- Help identify how other subjects (such as science, history and the arts) can prepare students to meet college and workplace readiness standards in mathematics and English. (Achieve Inc., 2004, p. 4)

This report led to the formation of the Common Core State Standards which were written by a group assembled by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) (Hess, 2013). The group was tasked with creating a set of

standards that states could adopt that would create college and career ready graduates (National

Governors Association, 2009).

These standards were formally introduced on June 2, 2010 and referred to as the

Common Core State Standards. Soon afterward these standards were adopted by states across

the country. Originally the District of Columbia and every state except Alaska, Nebraska, Texas

and Virginia adopted the standards at the state level. Minnesota adopted the English standards,

but rejected the math standards (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, n.d.).

The primary reason given for the rejection was that Minnesota felt the curriculum changes they

implemented previously were more rigorous than those proposed, and the state was already

seeing improvement on standardized tests attributed to these changes that were already in place

(Stacey, 2010). Even though all of those states initially adopted the standards, there have

recently been some states that are reexamining that decision and are considering or have pulled

out of the Common Core Initiative. Those states, and the reasons for their course change are

detailed later in this chapter.

In an effort to encourage states to adopt these new standards, the Department of

Education announced a competitive grant process entitled "Race To the Top" (RTT). This was a

competitive process where states, and the District of Columbia, would compete for

approximately $4.35 billion in grant funding. The states were graded on various criteria that

totaled 500 points.

The Race to the Top required states to adopt "common standards," but not necessarily the

Common Core State Standards that were put out by the National Governor's Association (NGA)

and The Council of Chief State School Officials (CCSSO). The Race To the Top and the

funding potential that it brought was one of the main motivations for states to move toward

adoption of the Common Standards (Lavenia, 2010). In the Race To the Top proposals, Common Core Standards were not mentioned. It referred to "standards" and "common standards." States also saw that this was becoming a nation-wide effort to raise education across the board. As more states signed on, the majority of the others soon followed, as not to be singled out as a state that did not want to have high standards for their students. The selection process was not handled by the US Department of Education; instead, it was given to a panel of peer reviewers that would evaluate each state's proposal and score it based on the 500 point rubric established by the department.

In the end, the Race To the Top Funding winners were Delaware ($100 million), District of Columbia ($75 million), Florida ($700 Million), Georgia ($400 million), Hawaii ($75 million), Maryland ($250 million), Massachusetts ($250 million), New York ($700 million), North Carolina ($400 million), Ohio ($400 million), Rhode Island ($75 million) and Tennessee ($500 million). After each round of evaluations, the scores given to each state were released in an attempt to make the grant process open to the public and give objective reasons for monetary awards (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

After the first round of judging, many groups looked at the evaluations and criticized the process and evaluation instruments. One specific criticism of the program was the use of the 500 point scale. A statistical analysis led to the conclusion that "The only apparent reason for a 500 point scale as opposed to say, 70 total points is to provide sufficient artificial variability in scores to make differences between nearly identical states seem plausible" (Peterson & Rothstein, 2010, p. 8). They suggested that an equitable solution would have been to judge states on a pass/fail basis and distribute the funds, in smaller amount, to all states that achieve a "pass" in their plan. These grants were the start of a $4 billion process (Duncan, 2010).

Despite the manner in which the grants were distributed, and the motivation for the adoption, most of the states in the union adopted the standards and moved forward with their implementation. As schools moved closer to the mandated dates for implementation of the standards and the mandated teacher evaluation system that comes with them, there was a growing push back from some states and education associations.

As 2014 began, the push back moved from rhetoric to action in state houses. Indiana became the first state to opt out of the Common Core standards in March (Wilson, 2014). In June, South Carolina (Ujifusa, 2014a) and Oklahoma (Ujifusa, 2014b) passed bills and had them signed into law which pulled the states out of the Common Core initiative. The ironic part of the bills in all three states is that they also required the states to develop their own standards to make their students "college and career ready" (Wilson, 2014, para. 7) or standards that are "better than Common Core" (Ujifusa, 2014b). The Indiana bill left so much of the Common Core in place that the original author of the repeal bill pulled their name as the sponsor (Wilson, 2014).

One of the most recent states to pull its support from the CCSS and PARCC is the state of Louisiana (Binder, 2014). Louisiana is unique in that this withdrawal was not the act of a legislative body, or even by the state department of education. The governor acted unilaterally to cancel the testing contracts with PARCC and Common Core. This is interesting because the governor "was a supporter of the national Common Core academic standards for mathematics and English" (Dreilinger, 2014a, para. 2). In the press release (State of Louisiana, Office of the Governor, 2014) detailing his action, the governor's office explains the legal basis for the decision. There are three rationale provided for this decision:

1. "The legislature is clear when it adopts a state wide code or set of standards, and it has not done so with Common Core or PARCC" (para. 13).
2. The applicable law requires that 2014-2015 standards-based assessments be based on "nationally recognized content standards", but does not define that term.

Further, the applicable law does not specify any particular provider of standards-based assessments, and there are multiple providers of assessment products other than the ones developed by PARCC. (para. 34)
3. "The applicable law does not specify any specific content standard for the State of Louisiana and does not prohibit the state from developing its own content standards" (para. 38).

The governor himself is quoted as saying "It is time for the Department of Education to come up with plan B" (Ferris, 2014, para. 7). Ferris (2014) expands on the situation saying "While the governor can't control what is taught in the classroom, Jindal has promised to strike down state contracts that are used to purchase standardized testing materials" (para. 6). What makes this situation unique is that that state board of education plans on continuing implementation of the CCSS (Layton, 2014b) and that the Louisiana Board of Regents instructed colleges and universities in the state that "all educators in the state will be still be trained to teach the national K-12 standards" (Layton, 2014b, para. 2). In response to the governor's action, the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted 6-3 to hire outside lawyers to sue the governor over Common Core testing (Dreilinger, 2014a). Recently, the governor has decided to refuse to allow the school board to hire outside attorneys in the matter even though the attorneys have agreed to work for free (O'Donoghue, 2014). While the governor has temporarily been able to avoid the court challenge from the state board of education on his actions, there was another lawsuit filed by Parents, Teachers and a New Orleans Charter School group (Dreilinger, 2014b).

In 2015 these cases began making their way through the court system. The case that was filed in state court was dismissed by a state judge in March. Members of the state legislature and governor Jindal filed this case claiming that the Common Core was causing "irreparable harm" to the system and children in the state (Dreilinger, 2015). The ruling was based on the time that had passed since the standards were first adopted in 2010. The ruling stated that "under state

law, they [plaintiffs] had two years to challenge the standards but filed their complain five years after the Common Core was adopted" (Layton, 2015, para. 7).

While the state lawsuit was thrown out, there was also a federal lawsuit filed that was allowed to proceed. In federal court, Governor Jindal is suing the United States Department of Education claiming that Race to the Top was "coercive and that the government's promotion of Common Core amounts to creating a Federal Curriculum" (Dreilinger & O'Donoghue, 2015, para.4). The Department of Education claimed that "The Governor cannot meet his burden of establishing that Louisiana has suffered or will imminently suffer a concrete and particularized injury" (DeSlatte, 2014, para 6.). In this ruling the judge explicitly stated that this ruling "was only on whether the governor has a right to have his case against the federal government heard" (Dreilinger & O'Donoghue, 2015, para. 6) and was not on the facts of the case.

In another state whose governor is running for president there is also a sudden move to repeal the Common Core State Standards. New Jersey governor Chris Christie has changed his thoughts on the Common Core Standards. "Early in his tenure, Mr. Christie backed the Common Core" (Brody & Haddon, 2015, para. 5) and led New Jersey's adoption of them. Now that he is focusing on higher political aspirations, governor Christie has changed his mind on the issue. In an educational policy speech he stated:

> It is time to have standards that are even higher and come directly from our communities. And in my view, this new era can be even greater by adopting new standards right here in New Jersey – not 200 miles away on the banks of the Potomac River (Mulvihill & Colvin, 2015, para. 9)

Christie later goes on to say that "It's been five years since Common Core was adopted. And the truth is that it's simply not working" (Mulvihill & Colvin, 2015, para. 6) and "Instead of solving problems in our classrooms, it is creating new ones and we aren't getting the job done for our children" (Mulvihill & Colvin, 2015, para. 9).

When taken as a whole these three quotes do not seem to go together. On one hand, the governor appears to say that the Common Core Standards are not good enough because he says "it is time to have standards that are even higher" and then goes on to say that the current standards are "simply not working." Those positions do not seem to align in a structural sense. In addition, the governor does not elaborate as to why they are not working, or what the plan is to replace them.

What makes this more interesting is that even though he views the standards as ineffective or below his expectations for standards, New Jersey is still planning on administering the PRACC test to its students. After talking about his views on the Common Core and its implementation, Christie announces:

> Now this will in no way affect our efforts to continue effective teaching and measurement of our students through the PARCC test. We must continue to review and improve that test based on the results, not based on fear and rumor and speculation, but results. I'm not going to permit New Jersey to risk losing vital federal education funds because some would prefer to let the perfect get in the way of the good. We must test our children because federal law requires it and because it is the only way to objectively judge our progress. Bringing educational standards home to New Jersey does nothing, nothing to change those obligations, and the PARCC test will continue as we continue to review and hope to improve it base upon the first et of results that we get back in. (Strauss, 2015, para. 4)

This passage from his speech is also full of statements that seem to be at odds with each other and the facts as they currently exist. The first problem is the purpose of PARCC. Pearson has allegedly designed PARCC to be a measure of student's knowledge based on the Common Core standards. If it has been determined that said standards are not the base of curriculum and instruction in the state of New Jersey, then how can the PARCC be an effective measure of student achievement?

The quote also talks about "the perfect get(ting) in the way of the good" (Strauss, 2015, para. 4). From an outside observation it would seem that the Common Core standards would

also fit that analogy, but instead the governor stated that they are "simply not working" (Mulvihill & Colvin, 2015, para. 6). So in one instance the standards need to be replaced, possibly by something harder to achieve because the current ones aren't working, and in the other case the PARCC is going to stay and continue to be implemented.

At this point it is unknown if there is a connection, but it is worth knowing that Pearson, who designed PARCC, is headquartered in New Jersey. Part of the reason Pearson is still based in New Jersey is that Governor Christie led the movement to grant $82 million in tax breaks to keep the company based in the State of New Jersey (McGeehan, 2011, para. 2). In addition to the $82 million gift from the State of New Jersey, the state also pays Pearson for the PARCC test. During the first year of the PARCC New Jersey spent $108,378,739 (State of New Jersey, 2015) for the right to give this test to its school children.

During the first year of PARCC and the CCSS, Arkansas began to question both programs. Early in 2105, Governor Asa Hutchinson formed a task force to review the CCSS in the state of Arkansas. Lt. Governor Tim Griffin was appointed to lead the task force (Kloap, 2015). The task force was composed of 16 members including parents, educators, business leaders and students, all of which would be appointed by the governor (Kloap, 2015). In July the committee reported back with twenty one recommendations. Some of these were recommendations that:

- Arkansas maintain complete and unfettered control over our educational standards to ensure that they reflect the highest and best standards for our students and will allow us to succeed in an internationally competitive economy (Governor's Council on Common Core Review, 2015, para. 15)

- The Governor maintain the current CCSS until changes, revisions and improvements to the standards are implemented (Governor's Council on Common Core Review, 2015, para. 31)

- The Governor work with the Arkansas Department of Education (ADE) and the Arkansas Department of Higher Education (ADHE) to assess student matriculation to and through four-year colleges and universities, two-year colleges, technical school or vocational schools and military service in order to evaluate student performance (Governor's Council on Common Core Review, 2015, para. 40)

- The governor stay the course and use the test provided by ACT because it reduces the testing time and is aligned with college and career readiness standards (Governor's Council on Common Core Review, 2015, para. 43)

At the current time the committee believed that the state should stay with the CCSS, while looking at those standards to determine if they needed changes in the future. Lt. Gov. Griffin was quoted as saying "state policy makers should have the flexibility to alter the standards to what ever degree necessary, be it 10 percent, 20 percent or 80 percent of the current standards" (Howell, 2015, para. 14).

This report was made public the 30th of July 2015. The recommendation to continue with the CCSS at this time was due to the timing of the report. If the commission had recommended wholesale changes instead of "maintain[ing] the current CCSS until changes, revisions and improvements to the standards are implemented (Governor's Council on Common Core Review, 2015, para. 31). When the report was released to the public Arkansas Education Commissioner John Key stated that:

> We're going to start school in August, and the schools needed to proceed as they have planned up to this point. We don't have a timeline for the governor's consideration of these recommendations. So for the 2015-2016 school year, we are moving forward (Howell, 2015, 19)

When asked what his vision was for Arkansas going forward Mr. Key stated that it was still to be determined what the standards would look like for the 2016-2017 school year (Howell, 2015). However Mr. Key did expand on some of the councils recommendations saying that "there were also complaints about the time consumed by the new Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for college and Career exams that were given last year and based on the new standards" (Howell, 2015, para. 28).

The testing question was actually settled in early July before the task force reported their recommendations, when the Arkansas Board of Education voted to change the testing that the is given in Arkansas from PARCC to ACT Aspire exams (Lesnick, 2015). The move was not unanimous, or anything close. The vote was 4-2-2. Some board members were not ready to make dramatic changes. Board member Diane Zook said "the state should stick with PARCC for the next school year while spending the next year investigating other potentially better options" (Lesnick, 2015, para. 11). So as the 2015-2016 school year begins, Arkansas will operate under the CCSS for at least one more year while switching from PARCC to the ACT Aspire exams. If the Department of Education continues to work on and implement the recommendations of the task force, the 2015-2016 school year may lead to drastic changes for subsequent school years.

These instances highlight a few of the official changes throughout the states. These formal actions are in addition to "about 100 bills to slow, stop, or reverse Common Core requirements introduced in state legislatures across the country this year" (Wilson, 2014, para. 4). These movements range from proposed modifications in the CCSS or PARCC to outright with drawl from both consortiums.

Illinois has not seen an organized effort to repeal any of the standards, or to end the PARCC assessment. What has occurred is that across the state there have been some educational leaders that have begun speaking out in opposition to PARCC. These leaders are not criticizing the Common Core Standards, but rather are objecting to the PARCC assessment and how it is administered.

The most publicized objection came from the largest school district in the state. In January 2015 the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) took the stance that they were not going to administer the PARCC during the school year (Perez, 2015). Their plan was to administer the PARCC at 66 of more than the 600 schools in the district as an extension of the previous year's pilot program. The school district says that "the test will be fully implemented next year (2015-2016)" (Perez, 2015, para. 10). School district CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett clarified the reason that CPS was not planning to administer the test district wide was because "too many of our children, over 400,000 of them, don't have regular access to the technology that is needed. And we find that is particularly so in the younger grades." (Perez, 2015, para. 8).

After a three-month stand off with the State Board of Education, CPS backed down and gave the test to all of the students that the state required. This was after CPS faced a loss of millions of dollars in funding (Perez & Rado, 2015, para. 1). In reversing course Barbara Byrd-Bennett had the following statement:

> I continue to personally and professionally believe that to administer PARCC this year is absolutely not in the best interest of our students. However, given the threat from the Illinois State Board of Education there is absolutely no choice that I can present to this board and to our community. (Perez & Rado, 2015, para. 3)

When the numbers were calculated CPS stood to lose $300 million in Title I funds and $100 million in special education grants. This would lead to the elimination of approximately 1,500 teaching positions if they did not receive those funds (Perez & Rado, 2015). The CPS Teacher's

union backed the district's decision to not fully implement PARCC. After the change in course

the Chicago Teachers Union Vice President Jesse Sharkey made the following statement:

> My advice to parents is, in your school, your teacher is being forced to work in a testing factory. But in your teacher's heart that's not what they want to do. You should do both your kids and your kid's teacher a favor and take them out of this dumb test. (Perez & Rado, 2015, para. 5)

This was not the position of the district; after the change in course Byrd-Bennett state that "CPS

would encourage students to participate in the tests later this month" (Perez & Rado, 2015, para.

10).

Further down state there were also several superintendents who spoke out against

PARCC. While those districts did not attempt to forego the tests, they acted in what could be

described as a passive aggressive manor. They sent a letter home to all of the parents in the

district describing their position, as well as publishing an editorial in the *State Journal Register*,

which is the daily paper in Springfield which is the state capital of Illinois. In the letters and

article they make nine points concerning PARCC:

- PARCC takes longer than the ISAT and PSAE, and preparation for the online version disrupts classroom instruction
- The testing period disrupts instruction because it includes two testing windows (March and May) that will span three weeks
- Students need more practice in navigating the computer-based assessment. Any practice time takes away from instruction.
- The length of the test contradicts sound testing practices. No competent teacher would consider subjecting third-graders to two 75-minute math assessments
- Educators everywhere have expressed concern about the "test stress" that will result from PARCC
- PARCC is currently not accepted by colleges
- The estimated cost of PARCC administration is $57 million, which is not the best use of state funds during a historic period of underfunding schools
- Educators expressed doubts about the reliability of a state wide computer-based assessment. There was a one-year pilot where participating districts encountered problems. However, not all schools participated in the pilot program
- School districts know little about what data PARCC will provide to guide instruction (Nevel, 2015, para 5-13)

PORTA School District Superintendent Matt Brue stated that "the district has had to spend $250,000 upgrading technology to administer a test that has little value (Nevel, 2015, para. 26).

There were also some policies that the states had to implement in order to participate in the Race to the Top grant process. Many of these policies were adopted without taking the time to gauge the necessity or wisdom of the policies. One major mandated policy change was the necessity to change the teacher evaluation process in the state. The RTT required states to:

> Design and implement rigorous, transparent, and fair evaluation systems for teachers and principals that (a) differentiate effectiveness using multiple rating categories that take into account data on student growth (as defined in this notice) as a significant factor, and (b) are designed and developed with teacher and principal involvement. (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 9)

Additionally, the RTT act states that the student growth data must be used for decision-making processes. These include:

> (a) Developing teachers and principals, including by providing relevant coaching, induction support, and/or professional development;
> (b) Compensating, promoting, and retaining teachers and principals, including by providing opportunities for highly effective teachers and principals (both as defined in this notice) to obtain additional compensation and be given additional responsibilities;
> (c) Whether to grant tenure and/or full certification (where applicable) to teachers and principals using rigorous standards and streamlined, transparent, and fair procedures; and
> (d) Removing ineffective tenured and untenured teachers and principals after they have had ample opportunities to improve, and ensuring that such decisions are made using rigorous standards and streamlined, transparent, and fair procedures. (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 9)

These changes in the states were adopted quickly to compete for the money that was being awarded as part of the RTT program. The changes have the potential to cause teachers to lose their identities and begin to make decisions in their practice which go against what they were taught in their professional training and move into using strategies and approaches that they believe are not beneficial to students. Some of these findings will be expanded on in the sub section How Standards Influence Teachers.

As all of these changes are being created, the question that is often missed in the discussion of Common Core State Standards design and implementation, as well as the other aspects of the Race to the Top program, is: Are these standards and changes needed? There were remarkable differences in the curriculum across the states – that topic will be explored in more detail shortly. The more important point is the fact that while voluntary, the Common Core State Standards have created a de facto curriculum. While the Common Core State Standards have not been created as a true mandated curriculum it has, with the national assessments, dictated what will be taught to children across the country.

Perceived Problems with Curriculum

Often the public points to the curriculum as the major problem with student achievement. If the curriculum is not relevant, not challenging, too challenging, and/or ambiguous, then it will not reach the majority of the students, no matter the quality of instruction.

Traditionally, public education has been seen as a public interest that has been delegated to the states and territories to design and implement their own school systems. This delegation is because "The United States Constitution does not clearly authorize the federal government to control the form and content of education" (Miller, 1995, p. 19). This has led to many different designs. Some examples of diversity in design are Hawaii where all public schools are part of a single district; Florida, where every school in the county is part of the same school district operating under one superintendent; and Illinois where it is not uncommon for the elementary school and high school in the same town to belong to different districts. There is no "normal" when looking at how schools are organized across the country.

Just as each state controls its own school organization, they also control the curriculum that is taught in the schools. Typically, this is established at the state level by the state board of

education or the state legislature. After that, the districts and ultimately the individual teachers are charged with administering the instruction of the adopted curriculum.

This has led to a wide range in standards and curriculum across the country. Two leaders of the Common Core movement stated that "academic standards varied so widely between states that high school diplomas have lost all meaning" (Layton, 2014a, para. 6). Before the Common Core State Standards are fully implemented, it is possible to look at the adopted standards/guidelines of different states and realize that they are different, not only in content, but also the sequencing of when certain skills are introduced.

Some of the most publicized examples of content discrepancies are the debate in Kansas over the inclusion of evolution in the state science guidelines, and in Texas over recent revisions in the social science curriculum. In both states, positions on the state school board are state-wide elected positions subject to all of the normal pressures and leanings associated with any political office. Candidates need to have a platform for what they want for the state, and campaign on it. Two of the most notable of these disputes are recent and have gained national attention.

Kansas has been changing their science curriculum on a regular basis for nearly fifteen years. In 1999, the topic of evolution was removed from the state standards and from the statewide examination. This lasted until 2001, when the political composition of the school board changed and evolution was reinserted into the state curriculum. After another election in 2005, the Kansas State Board of Education changed the definition of science so that it is not limited to natural explanations (Wilgoren, 2005). This alternative definition of science was seen as an attempt to bring the concept of intelligent design into the science classroom. Supporters of the revision are claiming, "Darwinian theory relies too much on unproven reasoning. Gaps in the

science, they argued, leave open the possibility that a creator, or an unidentified 'designing mind,' is responsible for earthly development" (Slevin, 2005, para. 2).

These changes to the state curriculum were seen as so outrageous that the two prominent national science organizations refused to allow the state of Kansas copyright permission to refer to their work. In a joint statement, both the National Academy of Science and the National Science Teachers Association wrote, "We have notified officials at the State Board and the drafting committee of our decision to withhold copyright permission" (National Academy of Sciences & National Science Teachers Association, 2005, para. 2). These new controversial standards remained in place until 2007 when a more "evolution friendly" replacement came into place. This marked the fifth change in science standards in the previous eight years (Hanna, 2007).

More recently, the Texas State School Board has worked to revise its social science standards. According to school board member Don McLeroy, the reason for this is to reflect "a more balanced approach" (McKinley, 2010, para. 6). McKinley also quoted school board member McLeroy as saying, "history has already been skewed. Academia is skewed too far to the left" (para. 6). The state board also initially excluded Thomas Jefferson from the section on revolutionary writers and replaced him with others such as St. Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin. While Thomas Jefferson composed the Declaration of Independence, he was excluded because he coined the phrase "Separation of Church and State" (Strauss, 2010, para. 2) which makes him reviled among certain groups of conservatives across the country.

The above are only a few publicized examples of variation in the curriculum across the nation. Examples like this, paired with business interests, and the effort of governors in various states detailed earlier in this section, led to the establishment of the Common Core State

Standards. The implementation of these standards and teachers' perceptions of them are what this study examines.

Arguments For and Against the Common Core State Standards

There are legitimate points of view on both sides of the CCSS issue. For the purpose of this discussion, outrageous and nonsensical claims such as "Psychological manipulation and data mining" (Effren & Osborne, n.d., p. 4), making the students wear "blood pressure cuffs, pressure sensor or posture chairs as part of instruction of assessment" (Richards, 2013b, para. 2) or retinal eye scans (Richards, 2013c, para. 3) are discarded. Those arguments are made by the uninformed who are trying to grab headlines for personal glory, or short-term political gain. They are not the work of serious scholars or any mainstream individual that is worthy of serious attention.

Even with disregarding arguments such as these, there is a serious discussion of these standards and their place in education. Currently, there are four main arguments in play when discussing the Common Core State Standards, and they will be addressed individually. They are:

- The Common Core Standards are the implementation of a national curriculum;
- We need the Common Core Standards to be competitive internationally;
- The Common Core Standards will take away the local control of schools, and place the control in Washington D.C.; and
- Students will adjust to the demands and expectations that are placed on them.

The Implementation of a National Curriculum

The first argument can be positive or negative depending on the point of view one holds. However, this statement has a factual error that needs to be corrected. Too often the terms standards and curriculum are used interchangeably. It is important that both standards and

curriculum be defined properly for the purpose of this discussion. The University of Illinois

(2013) tells us that "Educational standards define the knowledge and skills students should

possess at critical points in their educational career" (para. 4). The Great School Partnership

(2014) states that "The term curriculum refers to the lessons and academic content taught in a

school or in a specific course or program" (para. 1). These terms are similar, and can be

intermixed in application, but they are themselves very different.

With that understanding, unless every school in the country is suddenly required to use

the exact same text books, with read scripts for the teachers, and there is a standardized calendar

showing which days certain scripts are used, the CCSS are not going to be a national curriculum.

However, the performance standards would indicate that all of the individual curricula across the

country, and instruction in the classroom, would be working toward a common goal instead of

the patchwork set of state goals and standards that were previously in place.

The question that rises from this possibility is if standardization is in the best interest of

the nation. Singapore has traditionally been ranked highly in international comparisons of

students on international tests. This is the same outcome that is proclaimed to be desired by the

United States. After attaining such a standing on international tests using a standardized

curriculum, Singapore has been moving toward greater independence of individual schools.

They are trying to accomplish what is already present in the United States. Tan (2010)

explained, "The United States might be better served by preserving the creative elements that its

educational system and students seem to bring about" (p. 56). In the research of Wang, Haertel,

and Walberg (1993a) they showed that, "Changing such remote policies, even if they are well-

intentioned and well-founded, must focus on proximal variables in order to result in improved

practices in classrooms and homes, where learning actually takes place" (p. 280). Their work

showed that changes must occur close to the students, not at a distance if it is to be effective.

More important than the question of "if" these are a national curriculum, the question that

needs to be asked is "why"? According to Orlich (2010), "The standards movement put the cart

before the horse. In no state was a needs assessment conducted to determine what aspects of the

school required 'fixing'" (p. 47). Tienken expanded on this idea saying, "There is no evidence

for the need, and no evidence for its efficacy" (personal communication, March 3, 2014). One

possible answer to the "why" leads into argument two.

The CCSS Providing an International Edge

Another of the arguments justifying the need for the CCSS is that the United States is

falling behind international competitors, and if we are to survive as a productive country, and

innovative leader in the world, we need to implement these standards to improve as a nation.

Most, if not everyone, would agree that it is in the nation's best interest to be a leader in the

international economic community. Proponents of the Common Core Standards claim that they

are research-based, internationally benchmarked and shown to be successful. Tienken and

Orlich (2013) stated that in "NO case was there any field or pilot testing of any standard in a

classroom" (p. 104). Also they stated that:

> Absolutely NO experimental or control groups were used to evaluate the quality or
> efficacy of the standards! Empirical methods were not used to determine the efficacy of
> the standards. There is no independently verified empirical evidence supporting this
> initiative. This point is most critical, because once again we see a batch of brief
> enthusiasm and ideological advocacy labeled as research! (p. 104)

That quote was backed up by Tienken in saying "There is nothing research based or

internationally benchmarked about the Common Core" (personal communication, March 3,

2014).

This goes against one of the major arguments in favor of the standards. The document *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World Class Education* is a report that is on the Common Core website, and used as one of the major justifications for the need of the Common Core State Standards. It cites 138 different sources. Upon closer analysis it becomes apparent that "Of the 138 cited pieces of evidence, four could be considered empirical studies related directly to the topic of national standards and student achievement" (Tienken, 2011b, p. 59). Tienken (2011b) went on to further explain that "Many of the various citations were linked to a small group of advocates and did not represent the larger body of thought on the subject" (p. 59).

Also included in the Benchmarking Report are rankings of countries in various categories. One chart shows the ranking of 15 year-olds in Mathematics, Science, Reading and Problem Solving. On this chart, Finland is first in three categories and second in the fourth. The United States ranks anywhere from 15 to 25 in the charts (National Governors Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, & Achieve Inc. 2008, p. 13). By only looking at the numbers, the United States appears to be in the midst of an academic crisis; however, there are other factors in the rankings that need to be considered. In national population the United States ranks third in the world, by far the largest country in these rankings. A larger population means there are more variables to account for. Tienken (2011b) pointed out the absurdity of the rankings:

> Finland, the country that usually ranks in the top 5 on international tests has 5.5 million people. In the United States that's the equivalent of Wisconsin. In fact, the top 6 scoring nations on the 2006 PISA math test have a combined population of 240 million people. Singapore, another country commonly cited as on the United States should emulate has only 4.8 million people, a little more than half the population of New Jersey. (p. 60)

It is interesting that Singapore is mentioned in this comparison. As mentioned previously

Singapore is moving toward more autonomy for individual schools instead of a highly

standardized national model.

Ravitch (2013) went further in looking at the results of the latest PISA results which were

released in 2010. The first point that should be obvious is that neither China nor India took the

tests. If that is the case, how would we know that we were losing ground to those countries?

The second point that Ravitch brings up is that schools where there is less than 10% poverty (i.e.,

designated as eligible for free and reduced lunch) had scores that were "significantly better than

those of high-scoring Finland, the Republic of Korea, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, and

Australia" (p. 64). Similarly, if you look at schools where there are less than 25% of students on

free and reduced lunch, the reading scores were similar to the scores of the high performing

nations. (Ravitch, 2013).

The overall rankings are easy to display, and make for a quick read. However, to truly

look at what the numbers are saying is difficult and time consuming. That is why educators are

prone to being the subject of knee-jerk reactions of politicians who have neither the time nor the

interest in looking at the nuances of policy and governing from a position of knowledge.

There is also an alarming lack of evidence connecting test scores to America's

competitiveness as a nation. These arguments can be summarized by Tienken (2011a) in

saying:

> However, fortunately for proponents it seems as if some policy makers, education leaders
> and those who prepare them, and the major education association and organizations that
> penned their support for the CCSS did not read the evidence refuting the argument or
> they did not understand it. The contention that a test result can influence the future
> economic prowess like the Unites States (U.S.) or any of the G20 nations represents an
> unbelievable suspension of logic and evidence. (p. 4)

This discredits one of the main arguments being used to justify these standards. The argument shows up often to play to people's fears of America "falling behind" or becoming a second-class country. There has been no evidence that the United States is behind the rest of the world in innovation or business prowess.

With all of that being said, there is evidence that increased standards and exit exams can raise student achievement on said exams. However there are also concerns over what those exams actually mean and their overall value. Karp (2013) also gives us this thought, "A decade of NCLB tests showed that millions of students were not meeting existing standards, but the sponsors of the Common Core decided that the solution was tougher ones" (para. 33). It is important to keep this talk about standards and raising test scores in perspective. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) gives us a contradictory point of view. Ravitch (2013) explained, "NAEP data show beyond question that test scores in reading and math have improved for almost every group of students over the past two decades" (p. 53).

Both sides of the argument claim that there is evidence supporting their position. The main problem seems to be that the supporters are using evidence that does not stand up to intense scrutiny. The work done in other countries is true in those countries; however, there are demographic and systemic differences that prevent those studies from being true comparisons, or comparisons that are credible for using as justification for such a radical change to the educational system that has been so successful in this country.

The detractors are quick to point out facts such as the lack of field tests and that these standards were written by groups that were not professional educators (Cody, 2013). Those arguments are true now and do not sound like the best way to begin an initiative such as the

CCSS. However, they are not necessarily indications that these standards will not work or be successful.

The reality of the situation is that the claim that the United States needs the CCSS to compete on a global scale does not hold up under scrutiny. It "is an empirically unsupported fear that America will not be able to compete in the global marketplace" (Tienken & Canton, 2009, p. 3). Tienken and Canton (2009) go on to state:

> Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly, there is no methodologically sound empirical evidence that supports a cause and effect or even a strong relationship between any of the G8 or G14 countries rankings on international tests of academic skills and knowledge and those countries economic vitality and competitiveness. (p. 6)

Another way of looking at this is best summed up by Mathis (2010) in saying:

> For a simple, albeit superficial, test of the claim that national standards generate higher test scores, some have looked at whether high- or low-scoring nations have national education standards. For eighth-grade math and science scores on the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study tests (TIMSS), one observer noted that 8 or the 10 top-scoring countries had centralized curricula—and 9 of the lowest 10 scoring countries did as well. (p. 7)

Further analysis by Mathis (2010) showed that 33 of the 39 nations that scored below the United States have national standards, including the lowest nine. A separate analysis shows that tests of educational achievement and future economic strength have a stronger relationship in countries that are in the lower half of the Global Competitive Index (GCI) (Tienken, 2008). The study by Tienken (2008) showed that "Nations with strong economies (e.g., the top 22 nations on the GCI) demonstrate a weak, nonsignificant relationship between ranks on international test of mathematics and science achievement and economic strength as measured by GCI ranks" (p. 9).

Issues of Control

The third argument against the CCSS is that they represent a federal takeover of the education system in the country. The U.S Department of Education's website (2012) states,

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"Education is primarily a State and local responsibility in the United States" (para. 1). This is the line that has been repeated over and over in the CCSS discussion. This is repeated more recently by The Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (2013) saying "It was voluntary, we didn't mandate it, but we absolutely encouraged this state-led work because it is good for kids and good for the country" (para. 35). The question of who it is good for is up for further discussion since there are no pilot or test results currently. As far as the "encouragement" Duncan (2013) later goes on to say:

> Moreover, there's a difference between creating an incentive, which was absolutely the right thing to do, and mandating particular standards, which is never the right thing to do, and we will never do it, the states choose their standards; they have been free, and always will be free, to opt for different ones. (para. 37)

It is interesting to notice that in this statement he uses "choose their own standards" in response. There is no reason to believe that any part of his statement is not true. The points are concise, and easy to understand. Where statements like this can lead, or have the potential to lead, is something that at least needs to be explored.

The statement implies that if the states stay with something other than standards, then they would see the disfavor of the Federal Department of Education. That would lead to the possibility of federal funding being removed from the school districts or states that did not comply with the federal mandates. Federal funding is under 10% of the school operating budget; it was 8.3% in 2005 (Spelling, 2005) and is currently approximately 8.5% (American Association of School Administrators, 2012). While this may not seem extraordinary, those funds typically go for some of the programs that support the students with the highest needs. These include Title I programs and serving students with disabilities.

If the federal government were to begin withholding these funds to schools that did not meet the requirements that they have set forth, what would the ramifications be? In a court case

early in the history of the United States, Chief Justice Marshall declared, "an unlimited power to tax involves, necessarily, a power to destroy; because there is a limit beyond which no institution and no property can bear taxation" (McCulloh, 1819, p. 327). This declared that states could not tax entities of the federal government because that would enable the states to tax those institutions out of existence. This was not acceptable or feasible because the federal government was supreme and states were not allowed to destroy parts of the federal government that they did not care for. Instead of taxes, think of funding. Funding is the power to create or destroy. While the federal government has technically not mandated anything, it has made matters difficult to proceed without following the suggested program because of the funding implications it has created. Instead of taxing something out of existence, the government can withhold the funds and cause it to be destroyed.

As of yet, this argument has not reached its eventual conclusion. As more resistance is voiced to the Common Core State Standards, time will tell how all parties involved will react in terms of policy, funding and action. These reactions of organizations will determine if the CCSS are in fact a federal takeover of education, or if they are truly the suggestions that many are claiming they are.

The Question of Viability

The final main argument of the proponents of the Common Core State Standards is that standards have been neglected (Duncan, 2013) and that by raising the standards schools will improve student outcomes and improve low-performing schools (National Governors Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, & Achieve, 2008). In some instances, it may be the case that standards were neglected. If that is found to be true, the discussion shifts to who should have control of the standards and expectations for students as discussed previously.

The question that needs to be asked is, how do we know that these standards are age appropriate and achievable? The lack of field-testing and data lead many people to believe that they are not proven or appropriate. According to Tienken (2012):

> The vendors of the CCSS have a problem: They have no independently affirmed data that demonstrates the validity of the standards, as a vehicle to improve economic strength, build 21st century skills, or achieve the things they claim are lacking in the current public school system. (p. 155)

This quote deals primarily with the argument of economic gain. The first part of this quote also needs scrutiny. Tienken and Orlich (2013) pointed out that there was no classroom piloting of these standards prior to their release and adoption. Endacott and Goering (2014) summarize the absurdity of this idea by asking, "we live in a country that stands up against testing shampoo on bunnies but stands aside when product specifications masquerading as educational standards are tested on our children?" (p. 90). This lack of field testing or review poses the question of who, if anyone, determined if the standards were age appropriate for the students to whom the standard were assigned.

While expecting more at an earlier age is a great theory, and sometimes is effective, there is a general limit on what can reasonably be expected. In many schools, Algebra I is now commonly available in 8th grade. However, that is not going to be educationally appropriate for every student. The same can be said for doing geometric proofs in 6th grade. There are certain cognitive limits that exist for the majority of students. While the argument that we are not expecting enough out of our students, or better yet, we do not expect as much out of our students as other countries, sounds easy and gets headlines, it does not stand up to scrutiny after the tests are actually analyzed, and it begs the question of whether it is fair or not to expect more than students can do.

A central argument for the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is that we need to expect more out of our students if they are going to compete in the world economy. The argument that usually accompanies this is that passing a standardized test or graduation exit exam will raise the bar and get more out of the students.

Bishop (1997) studied the implementation of exit exams and found, "Our review of the evidence suggests that the claims by advocates of standards-based reform that curriculum-based external exit examinations significantly increase student achievement are probably correct" (p. 18). On the surface this would seem to indicate that establishing high-stakes testing for graduation would raise student achievement, or at least cause the students to take this more seriously.

In fact, Bishop (1997) found that "Not only did students from Canadian provinces with such systems know more science and mathematics than students in other provinces; they watched less TV and talked with their parents more about school work" (p. 18). All of those findings are positive, especially securing the elusive parental involvement. However, digging further into the report will show that Bishop discovered that there are systematic differences in school districts that have high stakes exit exams. These districts do things such as: employ teachers who majored in math and science in college, have high-quality science laboratories, and schedule extra hours of math and science, as well as having students conduct or observe experiments often.

These are systemic solutions that contribute to the added success. Success was not achieved overnight with the appearance of the standards such as CCSS, or testing like PARCC. They have been built into the school system by the teachers, administrators, and school boards as well as being reinforced by parents. It will be necessary to spend countless hours and untold

dollars to bring about the environment that would be optimal to improve student achievement, not guarantee it. While this work may lean toward backing up the theory that standards and testing will lead to better student outcomes, the results can not be taken without the understanding of the system that was being studied. Testing and standards did not show instant results; there are systemic structures in place that make these goals more realistic. This is reinforced by Wang, Haertel, & Walberg (1993b) who pointed out "Unless reorganizing and restructuring strongly direct influences on learning, they offer little hope of substantial improvement" (p. 1). Simple reorganization, often called replacing administrators and teachers, will not accomplish anything on its own. Systemic improvements, often which no one is willing to pay for, are needed to change the outcomes of the public school system.

However, before using the work by Bishop to legitimize exit exams as sound policy, there is another issue that needs to be considered. With all survey or sampling procedures, there is a conditional standard error of measurement (CSEM). When taking the CSEM into account, the "reported score of individual students might not be the actual or true score" (Tienken, 2011c, p. 300). There is an error margin built into the scoring process. A statistical analysis of the 18 states that reported enough group data to do the analysis found an estimated 118,111 students that failed the exit exam, but also fell within the margin of error (Tienken, 2011c). That number does not include the students from the states for which an analysis was not possible. In a world of high-stakes testing, an error such as that can be a major flaw in the testing system. A flaw that size should prevent the results from being taken as an absolute truth, and especially be prevented from potentially altering a student's academic career in that drastic of a manner.   Knowing numbers like this should make anyone backing the reforms question the use of high-stakes testing to measure student learning and determining teacher worth. Ravitch (2010) put it a more

concise way, "The problem with using tests to make important decisions about people's lives is that standardized tests are not precise instruments" (p. 152).

This is why a large-scale field test in different educational environments across the country would be appropriate, over a period of time, to look at outcomes. Unfortunately this was not done and data will be collected as these standards are implemented for the first time. Also unfortunate is the fact that if the students do not measure up to the arbitrary goals that were set, they will be labeled as failures or "at risk." The blame will not be placed at the top where it belongs, it will filter down to be pointed at the teachers and schools for not doing a sufficient job to prepare 21st century learners.

In order to improve outcomes, as determined by tests results, one of the things we often hear is how schools should be run like a business (Gates & Gates, 2011). In this editorial it is argued that there needs to be a system, competition if you will, to reward those that are deemed the best and be "candid" (fire) those that are not. This is similar to the system that was in place at Microsoft as of 2011, and worked its way into changed teacher evaluations as part of the Race to the Top initiative. In November 2013, Microsoft ceased the practice of ranking employees in order to put a larger emphasis on teamwork as well as growth and development (Morris, 2013). It appears there was a reason for this change, due to the fact that Microsoft's share of computing devices in the marketplace dropped from 97% to 20% in just over a decade (Worstall, 2012). It also should be noted that in 2010 Apple overtook Microsoft as the most valuable technology company in the world (Helft & Vance, 2010). Helft and Vance (2010) give some reasons for this development. They state:

> As Apple grew increasingly nimble and innovative, Microsoft has struggled to build desirable updates to its main products and to create large new businesses in areas like game consoles, music players, phones, and Internet search. Microsoft, which is a

component stock of the Dow Jones industrial average, has lost half its value since 2000."
(para. 24)

Microsoft's problems appear to be getting worse. In July 2014 it announced that there would be approximately 18,000 workers laid off. This represents about 14% of its workforce (Spangler, 2014). These cuts were by far the largest in the company's history, surpassing the lay off of approximately 5,800 employees in 2009 (Wingfield, 2014a). A large portion of the cuts will come from the Nokia Division which the company just recently acquired as well as closing Microsoft's Xbox Entertainment Studios (Tsukayama, 2014). Microsoft is still a profitable company, but is no where near the power that it once was. Wingfield (2014b) states that "Cutting jobs does not mean that the company will suddenly begin creating products that people love. And the cuts did not suggest a sharp shift in strategy" (para. 4). This business strategy does not sound like one that is a desired outcome, or something that leaders should want to subject students to being a part of.

How Standards Influence Teachers

Teachers have long been affected by policy mandates. As the professionals that have the most contact with students, they are most directly affected by mandates as they are implemented. On the state level, these generally range from things that are mandated to be in the curriculum, to the schedule and amount of testing that has to be done. For example, Illinois wants schools to recognize Leif Erickson day (ILCS, 1961a), and Arbor Day (ILCS, 1961b), as well as mandating certain topics be studied such as Genocide (ILCS, 2005a), and Black History (ILCS, 2005b). There can also be district policy mandates that may include but are not limited to the specific reading curriculum the district uses, credits required for graduation above the state minimum, and specific course offerings in the curriculum.

Every year there are mandates that are added to the curriculum. One example of these mandates is that starting with the 2014-2015 school year all high school students must learn CPR and how to run a defibrillator (State of Illinois, Office of the Governor, 2014). In this changing environment, the question then becomes: how do teachers typically respond when policy is mandated at the federal state or local level, and will studies of the implementation of past mandates give an indication of how the policy mandate of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) will be received and implemented by teachers across the country.

One of the major policy mandates that states impose upon teachers is that they have to prepare students for and administer standardized tests on a yearly basis. Until the CCSS implementation, the assessments generally varied greatly by state. As part of the CCSS movement students will be assessed by exams that are given across multiple cooperating states. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) is one such exam that was used in Illinois starting with the 2014-2015 academic year.

Looking at how teachers perceive and react to mandated assessments at the individual state level might give a preview into reactions that may come as a result of the multistate assessments such as PARCC. Segall (2003) found that secondary Social Studies teachers were generally not content with the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP). A yearlong qualitative study found that teachers described the experience of preparing students for the test as a "compromise" (p. 307). The teachers in the study describe how they have been forced to frame everything in relation to the MEAP. In the study, one teacher points out that the MEAP "doesn't evaluate students' knowledge in social studies. Instead, it gives students various charts and graphs and short scenarios and then tests students on their skill level" (pp. 310-311).

These thoughts are similar to the ones voiced by participants (teachers) interviewed by Meuwissen (2013) where they characterize their teaching as "reluctant compliance" (p. 300). These teachers in the study were under pressure of quarterly district mandated testing as well as preparation for AP examinations. The teachers struggled with balancing the expectations and demands of the district, with what they believed were best practice in preparing for the mandated exams. There was "district level discouragement" (Meuwissen, 2013, p. 302) of using simulations and other time consuming activities instead of strictly preparing for the mandated assessments. As discussed above by Segall (2003), there are pressures exerted on teachers to comply with the mandates as the leaders of the district believe the policy should be instituted, taking away a degree of teacher autonomy and decision-making regarding the curriculum and to a certain degree controlling the instruction. Teachers begin to feel this conflict as they "sense that current beliefs, knowledge and practice are in conflict with mandated instructional practices or when they perceive that their professionalism in decision making has been removed" (Riddle Buly, & Rose, 2001, p. 3). These findings are confirmed by Santoro (2011) who observes "for some teachers it is difficult to maintain a sense of doing good work when policies foreclose opportunities to teach in ways they believe are right" (p. 6). Irwin and Knodle (2008) make the point that "using a strict curriculum for a course limits teachers' opportunities to contemplate their purpose" (p. 40).

The teachers in the study with Sunderman, Tracey, Kim, and Orfield (2004) relayed their experiences with mandated testing to the researchers who summed it up by writing:

> From the responses of teachers and the many written comments they added to the surveys, it is clear that they want less focus on standardized tests, less time lost to testing and test preparation, a broader range of subjects and skills emphasized, and analysis of results that is based on how much progress students have made during a particular period. (p. 45)

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While there have been questions of the effect on the professional practice of teachers, there has also been work studying how mandates influence teacher identity. Taylor (2008) found that in relation to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) there was no significant difference in teacher identity among teachers that retired before the NCLB mandates went into effect and those that were currently teaching in 2008.   Other studies contradict this finding. Roellke and King Rice (2008) found that teachers were frustrated with the NCLB mandates and felt that "No Child Left Behind limits their autonomy as professionals, and has shifted control and decision making away from teachers in schools to administrators at higher levels of the system" (p. 291). This sentiment has been found not only looking at the implementation of the NCLB program, but also how teachers have begun implementing the CCSS. Bengtson and Connors (2013) observed that:

> Additionally the issue of professionalism comes into question. Teaching, as a profession, entails the knowledge, skills and attributes involved in determining what students need to learn, how to get them to learn it, and, how to assess their learning. Having the ability to create an environment conducive to learning where the individual student is at the forefront of being a professional educator. Much like a medical professional has the freedom to diagnose and treat patients, teaching professionals should be permitted to diagnose and solve the learning needs of their students. (p. 23)

The findings mentioned above show that current external policy mandates have the possibility of reducing the art of teaching into a simple "follow the directions" formula that does not value the creativity and individual abilities of teachers, which has made the profession appealing in the past.

With an understanding of the effects that these changes are having on the teaching profession, it becomes necessary to look at professional practice and what is happening to those in the field. Zancanella (1992) studied the teaching of literature and found two variables that

seemed to determine the amount of influence that standardized tests had on professional practice of teachers. They are described as:

> (a) the degree to which teachers' conceptions of the subject matches the conception of the subject the test represents, a version of what is often called "curricular power"; and (b) the amount of what might be called "curricular power" the teacher possesses, the amalgam of experience, status and position in the school organization that determines how much say the teacher has in both formal and informal decisions about which ways of teaching a subjective viewed as legitimate. (p. 292)

If Zancanella's findings are transferrable, and not only apply to the teaching of literature, but to all subjects, it would stand to reason that elementary teachers would react similarly to the new mandated policy of PARCC implementation. Those teachers that have the same view of the subjects as the designers of the PARCC assessment will feel more comfortable with the test than those who possess a different vision. The second point is similar to the findings of Hall (2007) who found that teachers are much more likely to benefit from professional development when they are part of organizational planning and decision-making. While standardized testing and professional development are two different areas in education, it is easy to see similar themes that seem to help facilitate teacher acceptance and the implementation of desired policies.

In a study similar to Zancanella (1992), although more extensive, Seashore Louis, Febey and Schroeder (2005) looked at high schools in three different states in an attempt to look at common variables that were consistent in the schools implementation of mandated standards policies. The variables that were found included:

> (a) stage of familiarity and experience with the policy, (b) the district's role as an interpreter of policy, (c) teachers' collective beliefs about power relations in the school and district, (d) the visibility of teacher practice and the frequency with which teachers discuss the intersection of standards and teaching, and (e) disciplinary differences. (p. 198)

Seashore Lewis et al. (2005) further expand on the variables saying, "Our data suggest that experience with policy, district role, and teachers' beliefs about power relations had the greatest

impact on teachers' willingness to make sense of the policy and incorporate it into classroom and school practices" (p. 198). These findings would tend to indicate that there will be a wide range of responses from teachers to the mandated CCSS policy and PARCC testing procedures depending on teacher perceptions of their school, district and role in the district.

The feelings of compromise mentioned by Segall (2003) also appear in the work of Connors and Bengtson (2014) when conducting a short-term longitudinal case study of two new teachers as they worked through CCSS implementation. Connors and Bengtson (2014) revealed that over the course of the year, the new teacher gradually shifted from a student-centered approach to what was regarded as a "managerial approach" to teaching (p. 12). In this school the district mandated end of the quarter assessments, last two weeks each, for all students and had a curricular map for teachers to follow. The students were in classes by ability, but there was no accounting for ability in the assessments. All students were to be prepared for the same assessment whether they were in pre-AP English, or general freshmen English. This is similar to Segall (2003) who found that teachers moved their instruction so that everything was viewed in the frame of the MAEP.

The recent work of Bengtson and Connors (2014) and Connors and Bengtson (2014) confirmed the findings of (Segall, 2003) in relation to external mandates. Different schools have different approaches to policy implementation and that will have a direct effect on the teachers in that building in their response to new policy implementations. Bengtson and Connors (2014) demonstrate that the difference in teacher responses to policy mandates, in this case the CCSS implementation, is directly influenced by the stance of the building level administrators. When the building leaders take instructional control from the teachers in the form of curriculum guides

and massive testing at the end of each quarter it centralizes the curriculum and removes teachers from curricular decisions.

Hall and Hord (2011) tell us that mandates can work. However, it needs to be "accompanied by continuing communication, ongoing learning, on-site coaching, and time for implementation" (p. 15). This is shown in the studies mentioned previously (Bengtson & Connors, 2014; Connors & Bengtson, 2014) as they appear to demonstrate the contrasting approaches and the influence those approaches have on the teachers, as well as if the teachers feel the mandates are effective or arbitrary.

Longer-Term Effects of Standards on Teachers

The previous section explored how mandated policy of various types influences and affects teachers in their practice. A secondary topic to examine involves teachers and how they work with standards once they have been introduced and become common in the classroom.

Prior to the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, every state had their own set of learning standards or state curriculum. The state standards and curriculum varied depending on the state and region. Earlier in this chapter some of the standards variations in both Kansas and Texas were highlighted. While those constitute extreme examples, more subtle differences were present whenever states and individual districts were compared.

Before the mass introduction of the Common Core State Standards, curriculum across the country, and internationally, had slowly been shifting toward the use of learning standards. This led to some studies of how the implementation of standards have impacted and influenced teachers in the classroom.

There have also been studies to show that teaching using standards-based instruction improves both teacher attitudes toward instruction and knowledge of the subject area (Tanner

2002; Kennedy 2008). Tanner (2002) found that pre-service teachers who received standards-based instruction in social studies came to view social studies as an essential part of the curriculum as evidenced by an increased interest in teaching social studies. Another interesting aspect of the study was the data that showed the teachers gained a better understanding of what exactly qualifies as social studies in the school curriculum. Tanner (2002) shows that "many post-test respondents showed an increased awareness that social studies is more than history and geography" (p. 120). Tanner's data also indicates that the pre-service teachers came to "view social studies as significant in helping children become good citizens and necessary for the preservation of a democratic society" (p. 120).

Kennedy (2008) compared two groups of pre-service elementary teachers. One group was using the traditional college curriculum, while the other used middle and elementary materials and the professor used standards-based instruction modeling. Both groups showed improvements in content knowledge, belief in standards based instruction and improved attitudes about mathematics. In a post-course interview one student commented that it is necessary to "teach by not showing them" (p. 56). In reviewing the study, one major limitation was found. While both groups did make gains in mathematical knowledge, the traditional course using the college textbooks showed higher gains (Kennedy, 2008). That finding may be problematic in training secondary teachers where more content knowledge is needed. However, this finding is contradicted by Spielman and Lloyd (2004) who, in a similar study, "have not indicated any significant differences by section on item composites by content area or solution type" (p 36). Although they do indicate differences, the study by Spielman and Lloyd focused exclusively on the qualitative findings from the Teacher Beliefs Instrument and not actual mathematical skills.

Time also emerges as a theme when looking at studies involving teachers and standards. Devries Guth (2000) found that teachers often saved the "fun" activities until later in the year when the tests were completed. One of the teachers in the study commented that the tests influenced everything that they did. It was hanging over the classroom "Like a huge invisible cloak" (p. 116). This time frame also may lead to less teacher autonomy in curricular development and decision-making. Martin (2008) looked at second grade teachers and their work using new district standards and pacing guide. Martin found that some teachers followed the guide and did not deviate at all. Others viewed the guide and standards as more of a "loose set of suggestions" (p. 190). Those teachers rarely used the textbook and supplemented most of their own materials into the lessons. The teachers with low autonomy (e.g., followed the guide the majority to most of the time) found the curriculum crowded with multiple topics that needed to be covered in a short amount of time (p. 193). Johnson (2011) found that all six participants in the case study mentioned time as a hindrance to instruction. Preschool teachers are also affected by time constraints to adapt to learning standards. Head (2010) concluded that "Most [teachers] agreed that the challenge was not understanding the standards, but finding time to incorporate all of the standards into the curriculum" (p. 83).

Studies have also been done with practicing teachers and how they view the implementation of standards in the curriculum. As mentioned above (Head, 2010; Johnson, 2011; Martin, 2008; DeVries Guth, 2000) all found that practicing teachers are viewing time constraints as a major obstacle when it comes to implementing standards into classroom instruction. Fish (2007) found that "formal teacher preparation programs also need to include *professional* and *practical* knowledge of how to establish rigorous literacy expectations and methods for planning and implementing instruction that leads to these expected learning

outcomes" (p. 123). This is similar to Head (2010) whose qualitative results found that "those participants who had attended college before the standards were developed or never attended college were having a more difficult time adjusting and comprehending the relationship between standards and assessment" (p. 100).

The positive news is that increasing standards and standardized testing mandates do not appear to increase teacher attrition (Smith, 2007). Smith (2007) attributed the rising teacher attrition rate to a different factor. It was found that "state-level policies that ease access to individuals with less preparation to teach, however, could worsen already high rates of attrition among first year teachers" (p. 306). Smith found that even with stronger standards and testing, the strongest indicator on a teacher leaving the field is the amount of pre-service preparation they have gone through. The more pre-service field experience a candidate has means "reductions in the likelihood of leaving" (Smith, 2007, p. 298) the profession.

If training teachers to take a standards-based approach to the curriculum begins to be implemented in teacher preparation programs, the next necessity is to effectively train the current practicing teachers to begin and implement standards based instruction.

Effectiveness of In-Service Training on Changing Teacher Practice

After a teacher begins working in his or her career, part of their responsibility becomes continuing to be able to do their job. This means navigating the process to be eligible to renew teaching credentials at the appropriate time. These requirements vary from state to state; however, it is common for states to require evidence of ongoing professional development.

In Illinois there are many different options. Some of them include additional undergraduate course work, additional certifications, graduate degrees or Continuing Professional Development Units (CPDU's). CPDU's can be obtained through various means

such as conferences, hosting student teachers, teaching college courses, participating in studies and attending in-services (Illinois State Board of Education, 2014).

If a teacher is going to renew their license with the CPDU option, the requirements range from 40-120 hours of professional development over five years depending on if they hold one or more advanced degrees (Illinois State Board of Education, 2014). Without any graduate degrees 120 hours are required. If a teacher holds an advanced degree in an education related field (e.g. Curriculum and Instruction, Educational Administration, Counseling, etc.), 80 hours are required. If two Master's Degrees in education related fields such as those previously mentioned, a Specialist in Education or Doctor of Education have been earned, then only 40 hours are required over a five-year period.

As mentioned above, teachers have many options to meet these requirements; however, most school districts provide professional development in the form of in-services throughout the academic year and often during the summer. Very few, if any, current teachers will be going back to school to become familiar with the Common Core State Standards. The vast majority of the teachers will participate in in-services and seminars to learn about the Common Core State Standards and what is going to be expected of them.

In-services come in many shapes and forms. Some are held in all-day sessions before the school year, on half-days during the school year, and full-days during the school year or over the summer. The question becomes, "How effective are these in-services in changing teacher behavior and approaches?"

Multiple studies have shown that, if organized properly and followed up on, professional development is an effective way to bring about curricular change (Adams, 2005; Krupa, 2011). Both of these studies found that a year-long professional development program that included

follow-up and constant guidance did in fact improve teacher trust in the curriculum as well as changing view on student learning. While practice was altered in the mentioned studies, Adams (2005) mirrored the study of Spielman and Lloyd (2004) where it was found that there was no significant change in content knowledge.

Those findings are similar to the findings of Brustman (2006). Brustman (2006) also noted that "the degree of investment dictated each teacher's level of participation in post-course professional development which determined whether or not these teachers maintained and/or peaked in high levels of implementation over time" (p. 134). These findings tell us nothing about the quality, length or delivery method for determining the effectiveness of the in-service in changing teacher practice. Brustman (2006) found that the amount of teacher buy-in or investment was the sole determining factor in a potential change in professional practice.

An additional factor for consideration in planning in-services is teacher collaboration. Hall (2007) found:

> "that collaboration is a viable means for teacher professional development, that conditions to support collaboration as professional development must be established and maintained in districts and schools, and that teacher collaboration as professional development has the potential to change teachers' practice in ways that potentially impact student achievement." (p. 99)

The districts studied found the greatest benefit when there was teacher collaboration in planning and executing professional development. Positive results were found in top- down as well as bottom-up designs, but the key is effective teacher collaboration.

Conceptual Framework

This study was conducted during the first year of full CCSS and PARCC implementation. That factor and conducting the study in a small rural school district will potentially influence the perceptions of the faculty being studied. The location of the study is similar to school districts in

which I have spent the overwhelming majority of my career. This experience will lend a familiarity and understanding of the issues that these teachers face in their profession.

The history of the CCSS show that there have been numerous events that led to their formation, and many different groups that are working both for and against the full adoption and implementation of the CCSS. As documented above, there are numerous states that either have or are looking to pull out of the CCSS and national testing consortium. If one looks at the current states that are attempting this, the question that arises is "What is the reason for this resistance; is it for sound educational or policy grounds, or is it for political points?" Support or rejection of Common Core "has become the litmus test for conservatism" (Perry, 2014, para. 1). Working in Illinois, there has not been, nor will there likely be, the wide spread uproar from the politicians or state education leaders over CCSS and PARCC. However in the state there is an acknowledgement from all of that backlash that the term "Common Core" has become politically toxic. The Common Core State Standards are now officially known as the "Illinois Learning Standards" (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d. c, para. 1). This is interesting because there is also a section on the state website that is devoted to the Common Core Standards (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d. a).

In looking at the main arguments for and against the CCSS, there are valid arguments on both sides. Locally, the argument that will resonate the strongest is the potential loss of local control. Illinois has a total of 863 school districts (Illinois Interactive Report Card, 2014). Citizens are extremely reluctant to give up control of their local school and in turn what their children are learning. This principle can be seen in the Illinois home schooling laws. There is no set curriculum, no testing required, no set requirements to teach home school, and no set

schedule that needs to be followed (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d. b). Parents have such

control that:

> Parents who choose to educate their students in the home through the high school years
> may determine when their student has met the graduation requirements of their private
> home school and is therefore entitled to receive a high school diploma. (para. 3)

This is the type of control that citizens in Illinois are accustomed to with their schools. Any

threat to that control will be met with resistance from parents, teachers and school boards alike.

During the duration of the study, this concept will be important to remember because it will be

constantly in the background whenever CCSS and PARCC are brought up.

With the introduction and use of new standards, the teachers will be at the front of the

changes. The question that concerns everyone is, what will these new policy mandates do to

teacher identity and autonomy? We often use the term "practice medicine" when referring to

doctors. This is because they are trained and then they use that knowledge and apply it to every

individual situation.

Teachers are also professionals that have been trained to look at individuals, diagnose

what they need and then to use their knowledge to best suit and benefit that individual. No

teacher wants to be told exactly how to teach students. A development such as that that has the

potential to strip them of their professional identities. I have always been involved with

designing my own curriculum and tailoring instruction for the abilities and needs of each

individual group that I have taught. As an educator I would not, and do not plan on telling the

faculty in the building what they "must do" in individual classrooms. Going back to the doctor

analogy, in my building I expect certain things to be taught, and how the teacher accomplishes

that will be left to their professional judgment and experience.

A statewide test has a difficulty comparing what the student's knowledge base is when there are such differences between the urban and rural areas in the state. A nationwide test has the potential to make education more generic and make teachers more of a monolithic group instead of accounting for the individuality of each classroom, school district, and state. As educators we need to do the best job that we can for the students that we have, and prepare them with the skills that will give them the best chance to succeed on both the standardized test but also in college and careers.

Every educator has experienced in-service training. Some of these trainings are mandatory trainings, others are content area specific. The literature shows us that if there is to be a change in professional practice by teachers, there needs to be buy-in from those teachers that are participating in the training. From experience, I have found that the demeanor and knowledge level of the presenter(s) are the determining factor in attention span and willingness to consider the content they are presenting.

I also know from experience that while schools have known that CCSS and PARCC are coming this year, the preparation for them has been intermittent. The biggest barrier to training this past year was the weather that central Illinois experienced. The district missed a total of 11 school days due to weather and a water main breaking. This caused the cancelation of several in-service days during the spring of 2014 that were to be devoted to the CCSS and PARCC in order to make up missed student attendance days. These missed in-service days were not made up. This will lead to varying amounts of familiarity with the CCSS and PARCC as the school year begins.

Summary

My experience with creating and implementing curriculum will be combined with the knowledge gained from the review of literature that was completed to form the conceptual framework for this study. The conceptual framework is designed to investigate elementary teachers' perceptions and self-reported adaptations to the mandated policy of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and PARCC assessments, and document any potential changes teachers experience throughout the first year of their implementation.

The main research question and two sub-questions will serve to explore teachers' perceptions and self reported adaptations to the phenomenon of the mandated policy of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the PARCC assessments.

The over-arching research question of this study is "How does the mandated policy of the Common Core State Standards influence teachers as evidenced by their experiences?" This question looks to document and potentially gain insight into the process and phenomenon that teachers experience as they implement the Common Core State Standards for the first time.

The first sub-question, "How do teachers perceive the adoption of the Common Core State Standards influencing their professional practice?" will explore how teachers perceive and experience the newly implemented policy of the CCSS and PARCC assessments. Teachers had the opportunity to describe the process that they are going through using the new standards and curriculum that accompany them. Additionally, teachers will have the opportunity to self-report changes that they are using during the transition. This opportunity will be documented and triangulated through a structured three-interview sequence, observations of the teachers in practice and completion of Stages of Concern Questionnaires.

The second sub question, "How does a teacher's educational level and past experiences affect their perceptions of the Common Core State Standards?" This question looks to determine if any professional characteristics of a teacher have the potential to influence their perceptions of the CCSS. Possible professional characteristics include but are not limited to: years teaching, years in the district, subjects taught, years in current position/grade level, undergraduate major/concentration, graduate course work and/or graduate degree(s) earned. The data gathered will be triangulated with the same data sources above (interviews, observations, and Stages of Concern Questionnaires) to identify any emerging themes that may be present.

Throughout the duration of the study, data will be transcribed and coded as quickly as time will allow. Analysis will be ongoing to identify potentially emerging themes and determine if the conceptual framework needs to be revised or refined during the study.

An extended explanation of the methods that will be used to implement this study will be detailed in Chapter three. Chapter three will outline the procedures to be used, and the rationale for those procedures.

Throughout the study, attention will be paid to new developments and information that is published for the purpose of keeping the literature review up to date. Newly published information, and developments concerning the CCSS and PARCC will be analyzed and included in the review of literature as it is appropriate.

It is anticipated that this study will provide teachers and teacher educators an important look at the first year implementation of the CCSS and PARCC in the State of Illinois. By documenting the perceptions, concerns and self-reported adaptations of the teachers we can hope to better prepare future teachers assist the current teachers in becoming comfortable in implementing the CCSS and PARCC testing. This study is a first step in attempting to

understand what current and future teachers are experiencing during a great transition of the

educational system in the state.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction and overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to document the perceptions and self-reported changes in practice of teachers as they implement the Common Core State Standards and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers assessment that started with the 2014 school year in Illinois.

This study has the potential to impact not only the educational leadership field, but also teacher education programs across the country. By recording these initial perceptions and potential changes of perceptions over the academic year, it will give educators themselves, and people who train educators, (such as Prek-12 administrators and college faculty), insight into the experiences and perceptions of practicing educators so they can adapt their professional practice in the same manner as the teachers. In order to complete the research project the following research question and sub-questions are proposed:

> How does the mandated policy of the Common Core State Standards influence teachers
> as evidenced by their experiences
>
> - How do teachers perceive the adoption of the Common Core State Standards
>   influencing their professional practice?
>
> - How does a teacher's educational level and past experiences affect their perceptions
>   of the Common Core State Standards?

In order to answer these questions and complete the study, I used the following theoretical perspectives:

Epistemology: Constructionism

This study used a constructivist approach. The study involved interviewing primary teachers with varying educational backgrounds and experiences to gain a better understanding of their perceptions of the Common Core State Standards. Crotty (1998) states that constructivism "points [to] the unique experience of each of us. It suggests that each one's way of making sense of the world is as valid and worthy of respect as any other" (p. 58) and that "all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world" (p. 42). The data gained from multiple sources was used to construct a deeper understanding of the perception of the phenomenon that the participants lived through, and attempt to represent that phenomenon in a much detail as possible.

Theoretical Perspective: Interpretivism

As mentioned above, the purpose of this qualitative study is to document the perceptions and self-reported changes in practice of teachers as they implement the Common Core State Standards and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers assessment that began with the 2014 school year in Illinois. Crotty (1998) states that the purpose of interpretivism is "to understand and explain human and social reality" (p. 67). The study was not designed to examine the facts, or the curriculum itself, but rather to investigate how the participants view the changes brought about through the CCSS and their work with them. This study is consistent with Crotty's definition of interpretivism and interpretative research.

Methodology: Phenomenology

The implementation of the Common Core State Standards is a major change that was implemented across the nation. Many different groups such as teachers, parents and administrators have experienced this phenomenon.

Van Manen (1990) describes phenomenological research as "the study of lived experience" (p. 9). Van Manen (1990) then expands that statement in saying:

> It differs from almost every other science in that it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience the world pre-reflectively, without taxonomizing, classifying, or abstracting it. So phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain/control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world. (p. 9)

Schultz (1967) contributes that " The man in the natural, attitude, then, understands the world by interpreting his own lived experiences of it, whether these experiences be of inanimate things, of animals, or of this fellow human beings" (p. 108). Later Schultz (1967) goes on to explain that these experiences not only guide how we view the static world, but also how we interpret change. When there are changes man "interprets these changes just as he interprets changes in inanimate objects, namely, by interpretation of his own lived experiences of the events and processes in question" (p. 108). That statement is the foundation of this study. The study looked to explore how teachers experience the phenomenon of Common Core State Standard implementation, as they are lived and worked through it for the first time and how they perceive their adaptations to the standards.

Sample

This study selected participants by use of purposeful sampling. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) state that "The logic of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation" (p. 104). Creswell (2007) suggested that when conducting a phenomenological study, a narrow range of sampling strategies is needed. This is because "It is essential that all participants have experience of the phenomenon being studied" (p. 128). Patton (1990) describes the type of

purposeful sampling that this study will utilize as homogenous sampling. According to Patton,

"The purpose here is to describe some particular subgroup in depth" (p. 173).

The subgroup that was considered is elementary teachers working in a rural school

district in west central Illinois. Everyone who is employed in the district will meet those criteria.

For this study, within the employment criteria, I sought teachers who belonged to a wide range of

demographics, including but not limited to work experience, education and age.

Patton (1990) states, "The validity, meaningfulness, and insights generated from

qualitative inquiry have more to do with the information-richness of the cases selected and the

observational/analytical capabilities of the researcher than the sample size" (p. 185).

Considering this, after all potential subjects are identified, six to ten subjects who worked in the

school that is the initial location of the study were contacted to begin the study. Once the

participants were selected, their experience, age, gender and other professional characteristics

were compared to other schools in Cass and Morgan Counties as well as against the state

demographics to determine if the teachers would be considered "typical" or if they would lend to

a "critical case" in the sampling.

After the selection of the subjects, data was gathered and triangulated through interviews,

SoCQ surveys to measure the stages of concern of the participants, and direct observations.

The limitation of this sample is that a single site is being used and that site employs a

total of 10 classroom teachers and 6 auxiliary teachers. The small district size limits the

potential participants. Other potential limitations in the sample are limitations that are present in

the school district. Some of these are the fact that the teachers work in rural districts that are not

ethnically, economically, educationally or socially diverse. The characteristics that are present in

the community are reflected in the staffing of the schools. These factors are the reason why these sites were selected.

Teachers served as the sole source of information for this study. The data was gathered through verbal conversations, written responses, and observations of the teachers in practice. The data gathered was derived from teachers' own personal experience and training in college at either the graduate or undergraduate level, formal or informal professional development and building level instructional leadership.

Overview of Information Needed

Bloomberg & Volpe (2012) stated that contextual, demographic, perceptual, and theoretical knowledge are the four types of information that are generally necessary in most qualitative studies. Table 3.1 shows the types of information that were collected for this study, why the researcher needed these types of information, and the method by which each type of information were collected.

Table 3.1

Overview of information needed

Type of Information	What the researcher required	Method
Contextual	Access to a rural school district	Site Visits
	Access to data on past years performance on standardized tests, including state assessments	Demographic Surveys
		SoCQ Instrument
	The study began with the teacher in-services over the summer and into the academic year	Isbe.net for school report cards and testing data
Demographic	The participants of the study were teaching in grades K-5. The demographics specific to the participants (age, gender, experience, education etc.) will be determined as participant selection occurs.	Demographic Surveys Interviews

| Perceptual | Describe your perceptions of the Common Core State Standards. | Interviews Observations |
| Theoretical | What is known about this phenomenon | Review of the Literature Data Analysis SoCQ Instrument |

Contextual Information

The counties being studied in Illinois are rural and have minimal racial and economic diversity. The population is 87.4% white (U.S. Census Bureau 2010) and has a majority of students who are eligible for free and reduced lunch (Illinois State Board of Education 2011). Certain districts have higher concentrations of students that are eligible for free and reduced lunch. This particular district has approximately one third of their students eligible for free and reduced lunch (see table 3.2). These factors are important to consider during the course of the study as both a limiting factor but also as an indicator for results. The demographics are something that the professional educators in these districts are aware of and take into account when teaching students. While not unheard of in the rural areas of Illinois, these factors differentiate the population from the urban areas in the northeast and southwest portions of the state.

The study was conducted on-site in the environment that the teachers practice in. Additionally, Patton (1990) points out that "Direct, personal contact with and observations of a program have several advantages for evaluators" (p. 203). Patton expands this statement to point out six specific advantages that are gained by going directly into the field and observing the subjects and interviewing them in their work environment.

- Observations will give valuable context to the data that is gathered.

- Being on-site, the researcher can form their own views of the program, not be dependent on the views of others, and their personal pre-judgments that they may bring.

- The evaluator will be able to see things that happen routinely, and not be noticed by the subject of the study.

- The evaluator may learn things that the participants do not want to discuss.

- The evaluator is able to see events for themselves, and be able "to move beyond the selective perceptions of others" (p. 204). In the same point Patton makes the point that researchers also have selective perceptions. This however is valuable "By making their own perceptions part of the data available in a program, evaluators are able to present a more comprehensive view of the program being studied" (p. 205).

- The researcher gains important firsthand experience to help them interoperate what they are learning through the other data collection methods. By doing this "the observer takes in information and forms impressions that go beyond what can be fully recorded in even the most detailed field notes" (Patton, 1990, p. 205).

The Common Core State Standards have the potential to completely re-shape not only the curriculum across the nation for the students, but also the profession of teaching for the classroom instructors. For this reason, it is important to visit the site where the teachers are implementing these standards. All interview were conducted at the participants' school. Mears (2009) encourages researchers to ensure that "it's a place where the narrator will feel free to talk and not be constrained by the surroundings" (p. 95).

Demographic Information

Specific demographic information of the school and district was retrieved from the school report card published by the State of Illinois Board of Education for the years leading up to the study and the year the study is conducted (see Table 3.2). Demographic information of the participants was gathered during the participant interviews, and demographic survey, conducted

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during the study. This data was gathered in the initial phases of the study and utilized in connection with the response concerning perceptions of the participants and their reflections on what they are doing.

Table 3.2

Demographic information of School, District and State

	% of students considered white	Attendance Rate	Low Income	Parental Involvement	Teachers with a Masters degree	Teacher/Student Ratio
School	95.1%	96%	34.6%	100%	16.7%	16.7 : 1
District	96.6%	96.1%	30.9%	98.4%	Not Listed	Not Listed
State	50.6%	94.2%	49.9%	95.5%	61.7%	18.9 : 1

Low-income students are defined as pupils age 3 to 17, inclusive, from families receiving public aid, living in institutions for neglected or delinquent children, being supported in foster homes with public funds, or eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches.
Parental involvement is defined as parents or guardians who have had one or more personal contacts with the students' teachers during the school year concerning the students' education, and such other information, commentary, and suggestions as the school district desires. For the purposes of this paragraph, "personal contact" includes, but is not limited to, parent-teacher conferences, parental visits to school, school visits to home, telephone conversations, and written correspondence. (Illinois Interactive Report Card, 2014)

Perceptual Information

The perceptions of the teachers were gathered by conducting interviews and distributing SOCQ 75 surveys. The data gathered by these two methods were triangulated with site visits and observations.

Initial contact with potential participants was made during May 2014. At this point I met with them and explained the purposes of the study and what participants would be asked to do. During this meeting it was possible to learn when the teachers were expecting to be returning to the building in the fall. Once they began returning to the building, the interview process began. This led to more frank interactions and reduce the novelty effect during site visits and

observations and allow "access to resources that are not always available in more traditional social science interviews" (Garton & Copland, 2010, p. 548).

On July 25, 2014 contact was made with the school's principal to obtain a list of staffing assignments for the 2014-2015 school year. At that point an e-mail was send to all 9 current classroom teachers, Pre-K through 6th (they were in the process of hiring a 4th grade teacher) to reintroduce myself and see who would be interested in participating in this study for the current year. Eight teachers replied stating that they were interested in participating in the study. Their grade levels, experience and other characteristics are listed in table 4.1.

Theoretical Information

While the idea of the Common Core State Standards has been around for over a decade (Achieve Inc., 2004) and the introduction of the specific standards for over four years, the actual full scale implementation of those standards is a new phenomenon that has been experienced by professional educators across the nation.

As the educational professionals learn more about the changes that were implemented with these new standards, more resistance is being felt. This reaction is summarized by Fullan (2001) in pointing out that:

> First, change will always fail until we find some way of developing infrastructures and processes that engage teachers in developing new understandings. Second it turns out that we are talking not about surface meaning, but rather deep meaning about new approaches to teaching and learning. Meaning will not be easy to come by given this goal and existing cultures and conditions. (pp. 37-38)

The question of if this nation-wide standard movement is a good idea, or even needed was addressed earlier during chapter 2. The point made by Fullan explains at least part of the resistance from educational professionals. There was no trial, field test or input from practicing educators. The "infrastructure and processes" that are necessary to facilitate change, or a smooth

transition are not present in this movement.   At this time it is unknown how teachers are going to react long term to this shift in their profession.

Currently there is a push back from education organizations and individual educators (Gewertz, 2013; Strauss, 2013a; Van Roekel, 2014; Walker, 2014). This has led to some states beginning to question their decision to join the movement of the Common Core State Standards in the first place. There are currently bills in six states to withdraw from the initiative, and that is not including the ten bills in five states that were introduced and failed to pass (Education Week, 2014).

This development is not entirely surprising. Recently educational organizations and teachers themselves have begun to take notice of what these changes mean to them. One factor that is essential to remember is that "the single most important factor in any change process is the people who will be most affected by the change" (Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Ausitn, & Hall, 1987, p. 29). For the CCSS and PARCC this group means the teachers. Furthering the complications is that fact that Hall and Hord (1987) have found that it takes three to five years for new programs to be implemented. This is "not a surprise to practitioners, although it is a disappointment to policy makers who usually want to do things more quickly" (p. 106). Fullan (2001) expands on this idea in saying that "Government agencies have been preoccupied with policy and program initiation, and until recently they have vastly underestimated the problems and processes of implementation" (p. 86). These two factors combine to demonstrate the "buyers' remorse" that is starting to appear across the country.

The best new innovations take a substantial amount of time before they are fully used (Hall & Hord, 2011). Hall and Hord classify those involved in change into five "adopter"

categories. Those categories are innovators, early adaptors, early majority, late majority and laggards (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3

Summary of Five Adopter Categories

Category	Characteristics
Innovators	• Are eager to try something new • Always looking for new ideas
Early Adopters	• Adopt new ideas quickly • Looked at by their colleagues as "sensible decision makers" (Hall & Hord, 2011, p. 220)
Early Majority	• Typically use due diligence • Typically the largest portion of a group
Late Majority	• Very cautious • Often need to be pressured both internally and externally into change
Laggards	• Extremely slow and/or resistant to change • Typically bring less back ground knowledge to decision making

Each category of adopter needs to be considered if change is to be effective. By the protests that are emerging, it appears that the most of the last three groups of practitioners were not convinced of the merits of this innovation as well as some individuals that may be classified in the first two groups.

Research Design

This study was a case study that used a phenomenological approach to gauge teacher's perceptions of the Common Core State Standards and PARCC assessments as they were fully implemented for the first time. For this study, the school is the case that is being studied, and the phenomenon that was investigated is the experience that the teachers undergo during the first year of the implementation of the CCSS and PARCC assessment. As with all phenomenological

research, the study sought to document and flush out the experiences of the participants in their

own words.

The study followed the interactive design proposed by Maxwell (2013). The components

and details of those components are explained below (see table 3.4).

Table 3.4

Components of Maxwell's interactive design

Design Component	Details of each Design Component
Goals	The purpose of this qualitative study was to document the perceptions and self-reported changes in practice of teachers as they implement the Common Core State Standards and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers assessment that was instituted starting with the 2014 school year in Illinois.
Conceptual Framework	This review of literature focused on four major areas. Those areas are: 1) History of the development, and adoption of the Common Core State Standards; 2) How standards influence teachers; 3) Arguments for and against the Common Core State Standards; and 4) Effectiveness of in-services in changing approaches and practices of teachers. As detailed in chapter one the researcher has an extensive knowledge of K-12 curriculum and content area knowledge in all four core curricular areas.
Research Questions	In order to complete the research project the following research question and sub-questions were proposed: 1. How does the mandated policy of the Common Core State Standards influence teachers as evidenced by their experiences? a. How do teachers perceive the adoption of the Common Core State Standards influencing their professional practice? b. How does a teacher's educational level and past experiences effect their perceptions of the Common Core State Standards?
Methods	The study used three data sources. The main data source was obtained from three interviews with participants. Those

	interviews were coupled with observations of the teachers during their professional practice. Those sources were triangulated with a SoCQ survey that was administered both before and after the 2014-2015 academic year.
Validity	There were three distinct data sources, interviews, observations and SoCQ surveys. The interviews and observations were coded similarly, and the data gained from these sources weree compared to the results of a pre and post year SoCQ survey.

These components were utilized to construct an interactive design on which to base the study. This was the starting point and perspective. Maxwell intentionally labels his design to be "interactive" stating that "the design of a qualitative study should be able to change in interaction with the context in which the study is being conducted, rather than simply being a fixed determinant of research practice" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 7). This provided the flexibility necessary during the study if the context should change, or new data is uncovered that could potentially change the focus or outcome of the study.

Data Collection

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to document the perceptions and self-reported changes in practice of teachers as they implement the Common Core State Standards and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers assessment that was implemented starting with the 2014 school year in Illinois. Access to teachers and probing their thoughts as well as observing their actions allowed insight into the thoughts, perceptions and feelings toward the new Common Core State Standards and how the teachers believe these standards have influenced their professional practice. In order to be a reliable study, the data that was collected must be accurate and honest. Observations and data were recorded in terms that are "as concrete as possible, including verbatim account of what people say" (Seale 1999, p. 148). Silverman (2010) adds to this quote stating:

I would add that low-inference description also mean providing the reader with long data extracts which include, for instance, the question preceding a respondent's comments as well as the interviewer's 'continues' (e.g. mm hmm) which encourage a respondent to enlarge a comment (p. 287).

In a different work, Silverman (2011) expands on this stating:

First, as we know for the uncertainty principle recognised in physics, all data are to some extent an artefact of how they are collected. Second, there are in principle no 'good' or 'bad' research methods and, therefore, the choice between different research methods should depend on what you are trying to find out. (p. 15)

Bearing this in mind, there were a variety of methods used to gather data for an effective triangulation. Patton (1987) suggests that there are three qualitative methods used to collect data. These are "(1) in-depth, open-ended interviews; (2) direct observation; and (3) written documents, including such sources as open-ended written items on questionnaires, personal diaries and program records." (p. 7). All three of these methods were employed throughout the study.

All data collected was archived after use for consideration and study. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed for later analysis and use. Additionally, contact information of the participants (e.g., e-mail, work location, cell phone) was gathered and participants were asked if they would be available for follow up if the study necessitated.

After the participants were selected, the first step of the study was to administer the initial surveys to the participants. This served as a baseline and give the researcher a starting point from which to move forward.

The second stage began with the first interviews with the participants of the study. These interviews were structured with the same format for each participant. As the interviews began, there was the possibility that follow-up questions or topics that were brought up by the participants that could have caused the interview to go a different direction than initially planned.

This was accomplished by how "the researcher follows up on topics that have been raised by asking specific questions, encourages the informant to provide details, and constantly presses for clarification of the informant's words" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 106). This was done by the use of probes. "Probes *frequently use the participant's own words* to generate questions that elicit further description" (Roulston, 2010, p. 13).

The third stage was the initiation of site visits to observe the participants working and using the Common Core State Standards. The goal of these visits was to "understand the culture, setting, or social phenomenon being studied from the perspectives of the participants" (Hatch, 2002, p. 72). During these visits there were interactions with the participants and short conversations that will typically not be digitally recorded. Any such conversations will be documented in a similar manner to the field notes that are collected during a site visit.

The last portion of the study involved follow-up interviews and a second survey using the SoC 75 instrument for comparative purposes. There was a minimum of three recorded and transcribed interviews per participant, as suggested by Seidman (2013). If the situation warranted or the participant has information to share, they are by no means limited to only three formal interviews. Along with the follow-up interview, or interviews, was a second survey. This was identical in structure to the initial survey to help gauge potential changes in the attitudes and perceptions of the participants toward the Common Core State Standards.

Table 3.5

Stages of Data Collection

Stage	Actions	Time Frame
Initial Stage	Attending a staff meeting at cooperating school to introduce myself and give a brief overview of the study	May 2014
First Stage	Administration and scoring of the SoCQ instrument	8/1/14 – 8/29/14

Second Stage	1st set of interviews	8/1/2014 – 9/26/14
Third Stage	Begin site visits	10/6/14 (conclude by 5/22/14)
Fourth Stage	2nd set of interviews	12/1/14 – 1/16/15
Final Stage	3rd set of interviews and scoring of second SoCQ instrument	4/13/15 – 5/22/15

No participant was "cut off" from sharing their perceptions and thoughts on the Common Core State Standards because of the initiation of the final stage of the study. Follow up interviews and site visits were scheduled to continue until the process was completed. Participant contact beyond the third interview was not needed as all participants stated that they did not have anything further to add at the conclusion of the third interview.

Surveys

The difficulty in working with both the innovation of standards and providing quality are best summarized by Krupa (2011) in analyzing the data when they remarked "the complexities involved in decisions and actions teachers make when implementing a curriculum are more likely to be overlooked if one only analyzes quantitative data" (p 235). This study is meant to primarily focus on teachers' attitudes and perceptions. The point raised above by Krupa reinforces that the primary source of data will be the in-depth interviews and the pre/post survey served as a way to triangulate data, not be a primary data source.

The second portion was a survey based on the Concerns Based Adoption Model (CBAM) to measure the concerns of the participants in the study. The specific instrument that was administered is the Stages of Concern Questionnaire (SoCQ)(see Appendix A). The Stages of Concern Questionnaire was chosen because it includes "Strong reliability and validity and the capability of using it to develop concern profiles" (Hall & Hord, 2011, p. 80). The development of concern profiles made it possible to look at the participants' standing with the curricular

changes as well as gauge their outlook. They can be seen as an Innovator, Early Adopter, Early

Majority, Later Majority or Laggard. (George, Hall & Stiegelbauer, 2013). This established a

baseline to compare to at the conclusion of the study. Within these large groups there are also

individual profiles such as "The Big W" (Hall & Hord, 2011, p. 81-82) which can identify

individual attitudes and approaches of teachers or their overall outlook such as positive or

distrustful (Hall & Hord, 2011).   This survey was done twice because "during the first year of

implementation, it is probably wise to collect data early in the school-year, and once again late in

the year" (Hall & Hord, 1987, p. 342). At the conclusion of the study, a second SoCQ survey

was conducted to look for differences in the responses, as well as areas of growth or change as

compared to the initial round of surveys. Additionally, this data source served as an additional

data point to triangulate findings.

Structured Interviews

A structured interview protocol was utilized (see Appendix B) to learn about the

perceptions that teachers have concerning the implementation of the Common Core State

Standards, for the "study of lived experiences and the way we understand those experiences to

create a world view" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 148). Taylor & Bogdan (1998) reminds us

that "what the qualitative researcher is interested in is not truth per se, but rather perspectives.

Thus the interviewer tries to elicit a more or less honest rendering of how informants actually

view themselves and their experiences" (p. 109). This led to a variety of responses that may be

similar in nature, but very different as viewed by the research participants.

These were conducted onsite as suggested by Siedman (2013), and happened three times

for each participant. Glasser and Strauss (1967) make the point that "another time-consuming

aspect of data collection is establishing rapport with the people who are to be interviewed or

observed. To establish rapport quickly is, of course sometimes difficult" (p. 75). This concurs

with Seidman (2013) who suggests a three-interview sequence when conducting a

phenomenological study. He has suggested topics of focused life history, the details of

experience, and reflection on the meaning. For a study such as this, the first interview topic will

be a focused educational and work history. These slight modifications can be done and maintain

an effective interview process. Seidman (2013) explains that:

> As long as a structure is maintained that allows participants to reconstruct and reflect
> upon their experiences within the context of their lives, alterations to the three-interview
> structure and the duration and spacing of the interviews can certainly be explored. But
> too extreme of a bending of the form may result in your not being able to take advantage
> of the intent of the structure. (p. 25)

 By adhering to this direction, slight modifications of the structure offered by Seidman, a

structured interview process can be tailored to the specific needs of this study.

Site Visits/Observations

Also conducted as part of the study are site visits and classroom observations of the

participants. The purpose of the visits is to observe the professional practice of the participants.

Van Den Berg (1972) states "if we are describing a subject, we must elaborate on the scene in

which the subject reveals itself" (p 40). Direct observations provided an opportunity to gather

notes and observations of the classrooms of the participating teachers as they worked through the

experience of the Common Core State Standards. This is also important data to gather

considering Woods (1986) reminds us that we should be "Sampling things as they are, not as

they are made to be. Much credit is therefore attached to such conversations that take place in

the ordinary course of events." (p. 68). Data was gathered through observations of the teacher,

interactions with students and factors of the learning environment.

Data gathered during site visits were recorded by the researcher and reviewed. The data gathered may lead to revisions of the interview protocol if necessary as well as the format and questions on the survey of the participants. If this need arises, the proposed revisions will be submitted to the University of Arkansas Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval before any changes are implemented.

Data Management

Before analyzing any of the research data, there was a system in place for proper management of all information that was gathered, including but not limited to field notes from site visits, participant interviews, and surveys. This system ensured that all of the data that was gathered was secured and able to be utilized to its maximum potential.

The interviews were recorded digitally on a SONY IC Recorder. From there, the audio files (in MP3 format) were removed from the device and transferred to the computer for review and transcribing. For each interview, the researcher transcribed the interviews personally. This is a vital step in the research process. Saldaña (2011) explains that if the researcher does not personally transcribe the interview they "lose the opportunity to become intimately familiar with literally every word that was exchanged between you and the participant." (p. 44). Once on the computer, each audio file was named to correspond with the date it was made and the name of the participant (via alias to ensure the rights and privacy of each and every participant).

When the participant interviews were transcribed for analysis, they were done using both the MAC and Windows versions of Microsoft Word. These versions are compatible with each other and allowed work to be done on both operating systems. After complete transcription, the interview were and placed in a three-ring binder. As part of the transcription process, each paper

was labeled (via alias to ensure the rights and privacy of each and every participant) with names, dates and times the interview was conducted as well as the location.

The second method of data collection was field notes gathered from site visits. The original notes were transcribed in a manner similar to the interviews, labeled with participant's name (via alias to ensure the rights and privacy of each and every participant), date, and location they were gathered. After being transcribed, the original notes were also placed in a three ring binder for further analysis at a later date.

The final data collection method was surveying the participants. The instrument that was used for this was the SoCQ survey to gauge stages of teacher concerns of the new Common Core State Standards implementation. There was an initial survey of participants before site visits and interviews to gauge initial perceptions as well as a second survey as the study neared completion to determine changes in the perceptions and attitudes of participants regarding the Common Core State Standards.

The electronic data that was generated from all three collection instruments was secured in the same manner. The computers that were used for transcription and analysis were backed up hourly via physically connected external hard drive. Additionally the files were synched daily with both home and work network servers daily as an extra measure to ensure data was not lost due to a hardware or software failure.

Data Analysis

Planning for Analysis

In order to conduct an effective study, there must a system to maximize the information provided from the data. In order to do that the data must be properly analyzed. "The purpose of qualitative inquiry is to produce findings. The process of data collection is not an end in itself"

(Patton, 1990, p. 371). After the data was collected, the process in which it can be fully utilized began.

Steps in Data Analysis

The first step in the analysis was to code the data. Atlas.ti was used to assist in the analysis of the data that is gathered and coded. Atlas.ti was beneficial because it "becomes much easier to analyze data systematically and to ask questions you would otherwise not ask because the manual tasks involved would be too time consuming" (Friese, 2012, p. 1).

The first cycle coding utilized open coding. This allowed an overview of the data that was gathered and allowed memos to be written concerning the data. This was vital because "memo writing also serves as a code-and category generating method" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 93). After some initial codes were generated, a second round of first cycle coding began, concentrating on patterns that appeared after the first cycle of coding. During this stage, it was important to "read a narrator's transcripts many times, noting emerging patterns or different points of interest each time" (Mears, 2009, p. 123). This attention to details and emerging patterns led to the next step of data analysis. Charmaz (2006) states that "coding is more than a beginning; it shapes an analytic frame from which you build the analysis" (p. 45). Saldana (2013) expands on this stating, "initial coding is intended as a starting point to provide the researcher with analytical leads for further exploration" (p. 101). Completing the initial phase was vital because "realizing that your data have gaps – or holes- is part of the analytic process"" (Charmaz, 2006, p 48). For this reason, all of the codes that were established in this phase are "tentative and provisional" (Saldana, 2013).

The second cycle coding method that was initially applied was focused coding.   Focused coding is defined by Charmaz (2006) as "using the most significant and/or frequent earlier codes

to sift through large amounts of data" (p. 57). The purpose of this step is "to develop a sense of categorical, thematic, conceptual and/or theoretical organization from your array of First Cycle codes" (Saldaña, 2013, p. 207). The use of focused coding is preferred because "Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely" (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 57-58). During the second cycle of coding, categories of data emerged. Categories are defined as "concepts, derived from the data, that stand for phenomena" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998 , p. 114). The coding process is detailed further in Appendix E. The list of codes that were used in data analysis is listed in Appendix D.

All three data collection methods (field notes from site visits, structured interviews and survey instruments) were analyzed in similar ways. After all data have been coded, it was looked at for emerging patterns. The three categories of data collection were looked at individually and as a whole. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) suggest that we "Use multiple methods to corroborate the evidence that you have obtained via different means. Triangulation of the data collection methods also lends credibility" (p. 113) and will "provide a rich and complex picture of some social phenomenon being studied" (Mathison, 1998, p. 15). Mathison also makes the point that triangulation will lead to one of three outcomes.

Ethical Issues

This qualitative study was conducted ethically following all of the guidelines established by the University of Arkansas's Institutional Review Board (IRB). This served as a check on the researcher's procedures and data safe guards to assure that the privacy and rights of the subjects of the study were protected.

The data was collected by surveys, interviews, and site visits/observations. Data collected from the individuals will remain private and confidential. Fitzpatrick, Sanders and

Worthen (2011) point out an important distinction that needs to be made: confidentiality and anonymity are not the same thing. "Confidentiality means that the researcher, evaluator, or person developing the data base may have a code that, in other documents, can be linked to a name, but that the identity of people providing the data will not be revealed to others" (p. 92). In order to assure that the data learned from the participants remains confidential, each participant was given a pseudonym to identify him or her. The code that identifies participants will remain secured in a separate location and on a separate computer than the data is stored on. This will be an extra step to ensure that the data gathered remains confidential.

As the researcher, I was known to the participants. It is common knowledge throughout the county who the administrators are in the surrounding districts. It was emphasized to the participants from the start that I did not work for their school district, and had no authority under the Illinois School Code or by district policy to evaluate them or even share my findings with the administrators in their district. Additionally, full disclosure of the data collected would be made to the participants to ensure that once they give consent to begin the study, it remained a fully informed consent.

Participation in this study was voluntary and participants were be able to withdraw at any time if they choose. Such withdrawal would have been completely voluntary and would not be subject to any sort of repercussions.

This study posed minimal to no risk to the participants. However, every precaution possible was taken to assure that the rights and privacy of the participants is protected at all times. In addition, full disclosure of this study was made available for every participant to review to ensure that they are being represented accurately.

Trustworthiness

The issue of trustworthiness arises with every study that is conducted. Trustworthiness can also be known as "internal validity" (Shaw & Gould, 2001, p. 126). "Validity comes from the analysis of the researcher and from information gleaned while visiting with participants and from external reviewers" (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 134). This study did not have an external reviewer; however, findings were triangulated among three primary data sources (i.e., SoCQ Surveys, Interviews and direct observations) to assure as much internal validity as possible.

Limitations

This study was limited in its scope and was intended as an initial step in the process of identifying potential issues and perceived problems that teachers are facing with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Van Manen (1990) reminds us that "we need to realize, of course, that experiential accounts or lived-experience descriptions – whether caught in oral or in written discourse—are never identical to the lived experience itself" (p. 54). All efforts possible were taken to assure that the described experiences are accurately represented, as close to the experience of the participants as possible, even though it can by definition never be identical.

The results that were found at this location may be different from a separate school where a larger sample size is obtained. Other potential limitations in the sample are limitations that are present in the school district. Some of these are the fact that the teachers were working in rural, high poverty districts that are not ethnically, economically or socially diverse. The characteristics that are present in the community are reflected in the staffing of the schools.

These factors are the reason why these sites were selected, however they may reduce the transferability of the study to other locations and conditions.

This study was conducted in an elementary school. The data gathered was exclusive to that school and that grade level. While it is possible that the findings could mirror findings that may our in a comparable secondary school, that is far from certain. Finally, another possible limitation to be aware of is the timing of the study. Due to the fact that this is the initial implementation phase of the Common Core State Standards, it is possible that the teacher's perceptions could change dramatically from the conclusion of this study to the next school year or beyond. This study is intended to be a "snap shot" of the teachers during the time of the study.

Timeline

In order to complete this study in a timely and efficient manner, the following time frame was used (Table 3.6).

Table 3.6

Time line for completion of this study

Activity	Begin Date	End Date
Meet with teachers who will be participating in the study	May 2014	June 2014
Distribute SoCQ Instrument Distribute Demographic Survey Complete Interview #1	August 2014	September 2014
Site Visit #1	September 2014	October 2014
Complete Interview #2	December 2014	January 2015
Site Visit #2	February 2015	March 2015
Second SoCQ Instrument Interview #3	May 2015	June 2015
Data Analysis and write up	June 2015	July/August 2015
Presentation and Defense	August 2015	October 2015

CHAPTER FOUR

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to document the perceptions and self-reported changes in practice of teachers as they implemented the Common Core State Standards and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers assessment during the first year of their implementation, the 2014-2015 school year, in Illinois.

Study Location

The study was conducted in the elementary school of a rural unit district in Illinois. Winston Elementary consisted of a Pre-K through sixth grade and was housed on the same campus with connecting buildings, to both the middle and high schools. For the 2014-2015 school year the school had an enrollment of 201 (Illinois Interactive Report Card, 2014). The school employed a total of 10 teachers grade level teachers, eight of which participated in the study. The demographics of the participants are detailed below (see table 4.1)

Table 4.1

Summary of Participant demographics

Name	Grade Currently taught	Total Years Experience	Years in the District	Other Grades Taught	Undergraduate Teacher Training	Grad. School
Elizabeth	Pre-K	7	7	N/A	Liberal Arts College via Community College	N/A
Erica	K	5	5	3rd	State University	Considering Reading
Samantha	1	5	5	K, 4	State University	MA in Education from State University
Jean	1	28	28	3rd, 4th, 5th	Liberal Arts College via Community	N/A

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					College	
Erin	2	43	43	N/A	Liberal Arts College	MA in Education from State University
Melissa	2	2	2	K	Out of State State University	N/A
Michelle	4	5	0	3, 5	Out of State Liberal Arts College	N/A
Doug	5 (Math and Science)	6	3	Self Contained 5th	Liberal Arts College	Currently enrolled in Ed Amin Program at a State University

Data were collected using three different sources. These sources were a series of interviews, SoCQ 75 instruments and classroom observations. The majority of the data came from the series of interviews and that were triangulated with the SoCQ instrument and classroom observations.

After collection, the data were organized, coded and analyzed to look for emerging themes that were identified during the data analysis. There were six major emerging themes identified. They were: time, shift in curricular emphasis, isolationism / collaboration, testing, age and developmental appropriateness, and curricular leadership. Each theme will be discussed in detail below.

Emerging Themes

Six main themes were identified during the analysis of the data that were obtained during the study. The themes that emerged after the analysis of the data were: time, curricular emphasis, collaboration/isolation, testing, age and developmental appropriateness, and curricular leadership. Each individual theme will be described in detail in the following section.

Time

The concern of time emerged throughout the study. Those concerns could generally be broken down into two separate over arching categories. The first dealt with personal time to align or plan new lessons to meet the requirements of the standards. These time concerns generally involved time working outside of class or not in direct contact with students. The second concern involving time was the necessity to include more material into the same amount of instructional time. These concerns involved time while in direct contact with students. Each of these will be looked at separately.

Non-Instructional Time Concerns. These concerns were primarily expressed in regard to planning lessons to meet the newly implemented standards. The majority of the concerns voiced were concerning planning for math. The reading curriculum that the district was using was based on the Common Core Standards while the math curriculum was not.

The overall issue regarding Non-instructional Time concerns generally arose around the issue of planning and implementing the new standards into daily practice. As mentioned above, this was particularly apparent in math. The math curriculum was not Common Core aligned and often the teachers needed to spend a great deal of time locating resources to teach a particular skill or standard. What often happened was that they created a patchwork system from multiple sources that ended up covering what needed to be done.

Michelle described it in this way: "I've got 12 different things in 12 different places that are all getting tied together to make a lesson, while I have the computer going trying to tie it all together".

The other adaptation that teachers initiated was pacing. With the standards there was more ground to cover in the same amount of time. Melissa described her approach in this way:

I felt I was spending at the beginning of the year too much time in a given unit, and I can't spend all year on this one lesson, so what am I going to do? This kind of makes me push forward, and if there's a problem I write notes here that more time is needed, less time is needed or what ever I'm doing there are notes in there to remind me of what happened this year.

Before the year started, Melissa also sat down and made a general outline of how many days she was planning to spend on each target area. Jean has similar concerns but constantly referred to them as "staying on target" to assure that the areas that needed to be covered throughout the year received the attention that they required.

Instructional Time Concerns. Time was noted as a concern more often in the context of content and being able to cover the necessary amount of material dictated by the standards. This was one area that the standards have caused Elizabeth some concern. The more detailed standards have meant that there are more things she wass responsible for documenting with each of her students. She described it in this way:

The only thing that is really frustrating to me is that as far as Pre-K is trying to get all of the assessment done, and all of the things in the computer, and we have to do it, it is in our grant, we are using their (the state) money and we have to implement the program the way that they want.

This perception is in stark contrast to the standards themselves, which she has no reservations about planning around or implementing. The documentation and record- keeping necessary has increased with the new standards and that is the source of her frustration.

All of the teachers (K-5) implemented the Daily Five literacy program for this year. At the end of the 2013-2014 school year, they decided as a group that this would be a strategy they would institute in an attempt to increase daily literacy instruction as well as institute a program that would be consistent throughout grade levels. This led to an increase in the time allotted to reading on a daily basis. Every teacher increased the amount of time devoted to reading from 45-60 minutes to a standard of 90. At the same time math increased to a minimum of 60 minutes

a day and in some cases it was as high as 90. The specifics of those changes will be looked at in greater detail in the following section.

The emphasis on reading and math led to a direct reduction in the amount of time spent on science, social studies and language in grades K-4. These areas were typically included in the literacy block. The teachers used science or social studies material as the reading topics for the students. This assured that they were exposed to the materials, had a chance to read about it and work with it, but the allotted class time specifically for that time was eliminated.

There were two exceptions, each handled in a different way. In fourth grade, Michelle rotated both science and social studies. During the first and third quarters social studies was on the schedule 90 minutes a week in 3 thirty minutes sessions, and in the second and fourth quarters it was science on a similar schedule.

Erin has a different philosophy on the matter. She believes "at this age the students really like learning about science and history, it is something that they truly enjoy and I am not taking that away from them." In her room each subject is covered at least four times a week. She expanded on her rationale for this by saying "people say to save time put them together, but is saving time really what's important? Or the material? You miss every child getting everything."

Curricular Issues

It was noted multiple times that the new standards forced an emphasis on math and reading, often at the expense of other subject areas. As discussed in the preceding section, the teachers typically allotted more time in the daily schedule than in previous years for both reading and math. This typically came at the expense of Social Studies and Science which were often incorporated into the reading instruction. Further discussion of each specific content area will continue below.

Math. All teachers increased the time that they scheduled for math instruction. For the

2014-2015 school year, they allotted a minimum of 90 minutes a day for math. They generally

tried to schedule their math block in the morning, with additional time in the afternoon for group

work and re-teaching when possible.

A major change that the teachers reported was an emphasis on mastery of skills before

moving on to the next topic. Erica described her math class in January, saying:

> … with math basically for the last two months we are doing addition. We really hit
> numbers hard the first couple of months, it was like one, two, the teen numbers are really
> hard, so that's something we had to do, and now we are moving into subtraction, and
> again, we're going to need a lot of parent work on that.

Emphasizing the standards and content mastery caused a shift in everything else that the class

was doing. Erin also expressed some concerns about the new emphasis on standards and pacing.

In January, Erin made this observation concerning math, "I guess there are things that I think

they should know in second grade, I saw them come in without those skills, so I think that I have

to make that up, and then there's all of this on top of that." She felt that the students did not have

a specific background that allowed them to pick up where second grade is supposed to start.

This sentiment mirrored similar thoughts that were present in fourth and fifth grade.

At the lower grade levels, these changes seemed to be obtaining the stated purpose of

better preparing students for math. Samantha made this observation about her first graders this

year:

> As far as like math, since last year I feel that she [kindergarten teacher] has started with
> the common core, they come in with mastered, at least the numbers zero through five at
> least with addition and subtraction and stuff, so that is better than the year before when I
> was starting common core and they hadn't been doing mastery of addition and
> subtraction.

This has enabled Samantha to be able to concentrate on the standards that are required for first

grade and not necessitate a month of "catch up" before beginning the material for the current

grade. It was possible because Erica began implementing the Common Core State Standards for

math in Kindergarten during the 2013-2014 school year.

Samantha also reflected on her own practice and believed that this year her instruction

was improved greatly. She justified this by saying:

> I think that last year I was just trying to reach the surface on the math, and now I'm
> definitely using the scope and sequence more, I found a year at a glance and take what we
> already have, and use well, we have math work books that aren't common core aligned,
> but I still wanted to use them because we bought them, so I was just trying to pull out and
> I'm getting a better grasp of using the materials I have and getting more that I need.

This was possible because Samantha was able to plan and concentrate on the material that she

was required to cover.

In the higher grades the gaps were more apparent and there were also achievement

deficits to be made up, due to the fact that they were not instructed in the Common Core State

Standards for the preceding three or four years. The fifth grade teacher quickly discovered that

there were huge learning gaps in the students' knowledge base. Under the old Illinois Learning

Standards the grades and skills were broken down into general categories such as "Early

Elementary" of "Late Elementary." Under each general category there were standards and skills

listed. In this school, as is typical, the teachers did not coordinate and the same skills were

covered in every grade, leaving the students to be extremely adept in some areas, while

completely lacking in others.

Early in this school year (Start of October) Doug abandoned what most teachers would

consider the "traditional" approach and moved to individualized standards-based instruction. He

grouped the students based on standards mastery and created an educational plan for each group

and ultimately each student. This allowed those that were ahead of the standards to move on,

and those that needed additional time to master certain things to work on those individual skills. Mastery was tracked by a computer assessment to determine proficiency.

This shift in instruction was accompanied by abandoning the traditional letter grading system and issuing students Standards Based Report Cards. Doug's goal was that "in two years down the road I would like 'I have an A' or 'I have a B' to be out of our vocabulary." and shifted to "I have met this many standards this quarter" or "these are the specific skills that I need to work on and get better at this next quarter."

Another benefit of this approach, at least for the upper grades, was a student focus of what needed to be accomplished. Doug uses a story of one particularly frustrated student to emphasize the point:

> With the standards-based instruction, they need to master a topic before I let them move on, traditionally we would do a topic, introduce it and then come back later to reteach it. I had one student who was completing their second week of something to do with fractions and asked 'I've been doing fractions for two weeks now, no one else has, when can I move on?' I told them, as soon as you get it figured out, not before, everyone else has left your group because they got it mastered and moved on. By Tuesday of the next week they too had mastered it and moved on.

Doug later reflected that this was a student who has probably always had that approach to school:

> They never have really had to do something to master it, they go through the motions and eventually we move on to something else. This approach forced them to take responsibility and master it so that they could move on.

Doug believed, and has experienced, that this approach had some "growing pains" at the start, but as time went on the students began to understand what was expected from them. He also believed that over time this approach will better serve the students and allow them to be more successful.

In fourth grade Michelle began to adopt a similar approach. She was planning on issuing standards-based report cards for the fourth quarter. She liked what she saw with the transition in fifth grade, and expanded her own reasoning for that approach in saying:

> I really don't like A, B, C they are completely useless, they don't tell you anything, parents like them because they are used to them. As a teacher or parent they don't tell me anything. It's useless as to what my kid knows. It doesn't tell you anything, your kid has a "B" in reading. Well they are doing good, but why? Why do they have that? Here is what they are excelling at, here is what they are deficient at, that's why I like a standards based report card.

When asked if they planned to follow the same plan next year for standards-based report cards both Michelle and Doug stated that they were. Both of them felt that this approach was the best for targeting individual student needs as well as addressing the learning gaps that are present from the students not having Common Core based instruction in the previous grades.

Reading. As mentioned in the previous section, the school adopted Daily Five Literacy instruction across the grade levels (K-5). This was met with generally positive perceptions.

In Kindergarten Erica characterized her students as "excited" but also found that "my higher kids loved Daily Five, the lower level kids didn't hate it, but they did struggle with it more." Melissa also believed that the Daily Five was a great help to her students. She stated that "I think that starting Daily Five helped a lot, and it worked very very well, I think that it helped their reading scores as well, next year I definitely want to try daily 3 math." Samantha's perceptions of the Daily Five's benefits were similar as well as her plans to branch out into math next year. She believes:

> I did the Daily Five for reading, and I wish that I had established a Daily Three for math because it allows for students to work at different paces. I had a lot that would get things done and then I would have some concrete activities for them when they were done.

Both Samantha and Melissa are planning on beginning the 2015-2016 school year with Daily Three as part of their regular math instruction.

At the higher grade levels the Daily Five was also perceived as a positive. Michelle stated "I think that they love it, they love the freedom and I think that we can play with it a lot more, we love it in here." She also found that the students adapted to the process well. She found that the students were able to take responsibility for their own learning. Here is how she characterizes her role and the student's response: "I mean that we review what I want to see and hear, all that stuff, we review it every couple of weeks, they are very good at it, they are very independent and they love it." In first grade Samantha also was happy with the program, but was not as positive about her students and their ability to master the system. She said "hopefully it will be more of a routine than a novelty, it takes up so much time to train them to do it, we hope that because they have already been trained to do it, it will just be refreshing." She stated that the students got better as the year went on, but they often ended up having problems remembering and staying on track. Even with those occasional struggles Samantha still found the Daily Five helpful because in her words "it gives them time with me and ways to be productive when they aren't with me."

The extended time devoted to reading has often come at the expense of both Social Studies and Science. One way the teachers have adapted to this change is to focus the non-fiction reading of their students in these curricular areas.

In second grade, Melissa described her approach to covering all of the content areas. Due to the extra time that has been channeled to reading and math, something had to be changed to make up the time. Melissa's approach was that she "base(s) science and social studies on the non fiction reading that we are doing". She found that this approach worked well because she has seen student excitement and interest. The students are excited about the material: "they love the planets, they love the Sun and things like that, they also have really liked reading about

reptiles." Jean said that her students enjoy the non-fiction reading as well, especially the boys. She stated "they consider it (fiction) 'girly.' They very much prefer the non-fiction and I know they are getting something out of it because for days after reading it they run around asking people 'did you know?' " Erin tried to maintain a balance of reading material. She concurred that the students like the non-fiction, but also were interested in fiction. For her class at least she observed that "they don't really have a huge preference on fiction vs. non fiction. This age definitely likes both."

In addition to the structural change in reading in the content area, another change that the teachers reported was the emphasis on reading stamina. They began the year with this goal in mind, knowing that the students would be subject to both MAP and PARCC testing later in the year. Erin focused on this often. In her planning she stated that "I tried to make more of an emphasis on reading longer passages and having the students comprehend them."

Even though Jean teaches students a grade younger than Erin, she focused on stamina as well. What she saw is that "it's hard at this age for them to stay focused and do something, anything for that amount of time and not mess around." Jean also talked about her strategy early in the year saying "we had to build up stamina, and it seems like I didn't move as fast as I would have liked to have moved." Later Jean said that the class eventually "caught up" with the targets she had in mind at the start of the year. When asked how this year's results will influence her planning for next year she stated "Next year everything won't be completely new (standards and Daily Five), but I suppose that we will have to do all of it again (slowly build up stamina), but at least we have been through it before."

Isolationism / Collaboration

The third theme that emerged was individual teachers feeling a sense of isolationism in their job. The majority of the teachers in the building did not have a grade level counterpart to work with; they were the only teacher at that grade level. For the teachers that were in a double grade, first and second, scheduling has prevented those teachers from having common prep time, or a chance to collaborate during the workday. Additionally, many of them coached or sponsored activities in the high school, occupying their time after school. These factors, along with the fact that everyone except first and second grade were a single grade, severely limited the amount of time available to collaborate or work with other teachers in or near their grade level.

The teachers in the school knew from experience that this was how the school operated. If there was a split grade, like with first and second this year, that was an occasional thing and rarely happened more that one year at a time. If they had another teacher at the same grade level as them, they likely will not be in a split grade the following the following year and be some time before it happened again. This meant that the idea of working alone at a grade level was not a new concept or idea to them. However with all of the changes, the fact that there was not a larger educational community around them led to feelings of isolationism and occasionally frustration in the participants.

Erica said that her approach this year was to "look up a standard, look at how long it should take, print off what you can about it, and then begin planning." When asked how that system was working for her she replied "Ok I guess, I'm the only kindergarten here so its not like I can go ask someone else how it's going for them." Samantha had similar frustrations. In January she said "there are times where I get frustrated and I feel that I have no idea what is

going on but who can I talk to? I hope I'm doing it right." After reflecting on the year in May Samantha stated:

> I think it would be helpful that if something isn't working to be able to go over and say 'this is isn't working, and I need to do something different, what is working for you? What did you do, how did it work? Why did it work? Things like that.

Samantha's statement of "I hope I'm doing it right" and "what is working for you" was repeated in many similar ways across the grade levels. Melissa stated that she would like "more feedback, something like 'hey, you're doing a good job' or even 'hey, you have no idea what you're doing do you?'" She later expanded on that saying that "I'm just looking for some affirmation." In reflecting on the year Michelle believed that more validation would have been helpful. She stated "I think that we always need validation, we are human after all."

Elizabeth had a similar view saying "when you're the only person doing this here, or really the only person certified to do this (Pre-K) who are you supposed to ask questions to?" Jean concurred in saying "it is definitely easier when you have someone else to work with and talk to about all of these things going on." Michelle attempted to alleviate this by working with the third grade teacher. "I'm the only fourth grade teacher, she's the only third grade teacher, it's not ideal but it does help some."

While every teacher expressed some perceptions of isolationism in their position, no one had reservations to the extent that it was hindering their performance or implementation of the new standards. They expressed ideas that they believed would make their job easier and potentially more effective. Erica summed up her feelings in stating "I'm doing the best I can and I assume I'm doing at least something right because no one has came and told me otherwise."

It is also worth noting that the teachers have received guidance in the implementation process. The building principal has been active in working so that the teachers would be

prepared for the changes that started with the 2014-2015 school year, and monitoring the overall process. The perceptions of the principal's academic and curricular leadership will be discussed in a following section. The "isolation" feeling and inability to ask questions that were repeatedly brought up refer to working with peers in a similar assignment.

Testing

Only two of the teachers in the study were directly involved with PARCC. However, all grades from kindergarten to grade six take the Measurement of Academic Progress (MAP). Pre-K does not take the MAP; they use a different assessment based on the Early Childhood Learning Standards. The teachers expressed a distinct difference of opinion on the two tests and their formats.   A detailed discussion of each is included below.

MAP. The MAP testing was administered to each grade K-6 three times a year. The test was computer-based and the teachers were able to get results quickly to determine how their students did. In the most recent test (Spring 2015) the questions shifted to being Common Core based.

Erica was happy with the results from her students. She said that "they all actually did very well, they all scored like 10-30 points higher than they are supposed to be at the end of Kindergarten. I was really nervous since this test was supposed to be for the Common Core." She stated that they were supposed to be in the 150's and all of her students were in at last the 160's while some were in the 180's. These results were in both math and reading.

Erin questioned some of the things that were on the second grade test. She questioned the length of the reading passages that were on the test. She stated that "it wasn't the content as much at the length, it was just so long, it was huge." She also observed that "I mean I looked at some of the things that the kids were supposed to read and I thought to myself that I'm not sure

that I could sit through that and come up with the right answers." She also believed that at the second grade level the test was as much a measure of the student's ability to run a computer as much as it was a test of knowledge. In fourth grade Michelle had similar observations about the reading test. She found that "In reading I think that they were…… well the passages were so long that losing focus was the issue with them."

All of the teachers mentioned some of the same reservations about the MAP. Their biggest concern was that the test did not have a set bank of questions. The test based subsequent questions on the performance of the students. This led to many students getting questions that were more than they were equipped to handle.

Melissa characterized this as "there was a huge jump, my kids were freaking out when they were asked what was 5000 x 23." She also questions how valid of a test of second grade skills it can be when it does not ask solely second grade questions. Erica saw many of the same issues. She questioned why "it had a bunch of money and time on there, as well as 2D and 3D shapes. Those aren't things that I teach, how are they supposed to know them?"

Doug had a different frustration and observation with the test. He observed that:

I have a pretty big gap between my high achievers and my lower students, and my lowest achievers when they can't tell time, they continue to get time problems, until they get them right, it would suggest that they don't know anything when they really do, it will place them at the third grade level, when they have learned so much this year.

He had been seeing his students getting questions on the same topics that they did not answer correctly on the last test. This did not give them a chance to move past those areas and be asked questions on a different topic. His point of view on this was "If they did not know it two months ago, stop beating them over the head with it, they probably still don't know it and let's see what they know now." Even with this problem he believed that the MAP was useful in classroom instruction. He said that "the MAP results that I pull up match fairly accurately with my

classroom observations." Jean concurred in this perception stating that "the MAP is a fairly decent test to recognize what the kids know and don't know".

PARCC. The PARCC was only administered by Michelle and Doug, who teach fourth and fifth grade respectively. Even though only two of the teachers in the study gave the PARCC test was on the mind of teachers throughout the school.

Samantha talked about the PARCC and the influence it had in first grade:

> We've talked about it, but what I've gotten out of it is that we have to, well it sounds like the standards are higher, so you have to score higher to meet and that's going to be a problem and it's going to be more, it's going to be Common Core related, we have to get them going on their writing text evidence and things like that and computer based, so we need to get them on the computer because if they don't know how to start doing that stuff, at our age (first grade) then how will they know about it in third.

Along with the curricular and instructional changes she mentioned above, Samantha also discussed the technology that her students would need to master for the PARCC in saying, "I know that we have this (program) where we do a mixture of computer and iPad and some of them have been doing typing lessons and things to get ready for typing because I don't know if they have to do writing on PARCC."

Samantha's counterpart Jean reported some similar changes to curriculum and instruction in her first grade room as well. Jean also was relieved that first grade was not part of PARCC. She stated "I've heard it's really hard, I've heard people say they've tried, adults have tried a third or fourth grade test and they can't pass."

In second grade Erin had similar perceptions of the PARCC. Her teaching strategy was "I made sure that I covered what they needed, but I would have done that anyway whether there were tests or not." The reason she took this approach was that "it goes back to my philosophy of not teaching for a test, we should be teaching a child not for a test."

She also shared the observation that she did not see much outrage or resistance to the standards, but rather the assessment. Calling upon her years of experience, Erin also provided this word of caution: "Every year we do a little less teaching and a little more testing, and that is not a good thing." She has seen the evolution of standardized testing in public education and has seen it grow exponentially in both time consumed and emphasis on in recent years.

Even though these teachers were not directly involved in administering the PARCC assessment, their perceptions were reflective of those that were. Both the fourth and fifth grade teachers reported similar observations.

Michelle found that the way the PARCC was asking its questions was a major problem for her students. She characterized it by saying "the crazy questions were dancing around it, they never came out and said what they wanted." She feels that "if they were to just come out and say 'summarize this' they would have all been just fine." Michelle also felt that the test was working counter to the way teachers were taught to teach writing. She taught the students that "writing is a process, that is how we teach the kids, they start, revise, then edit, writing is not sitting down at the computer and throwing something together." She felt that "this test is asking them to sprint a marathon, see how much your little brain can process and type it up as fast as possible." After reflecting on what she saw, Michelle was convinced that if they had time and a process in place for this, they would have done much better.

These problems led Michelle to question the validity of the test. Her perception was that the form the questions were in directly led to frustration in the students and the test is not leading to a measurement of what they know. She summed that observation up in saying:

> None of these is written in kid language, we have to remember that we are dealing with nine-year olds here, and it looked to me that the questions were written at least the middle school, if not high school level.

Doug stated that his students had significant struggles with PARCC, to the point of frustration. His initial thoughts after seeing this were that "they (students) were either really ill-prepared for the test, or the test was ill-prepared to assess them". He went on to characterize the reaction of the students to the first PARCC test in this manner:

> They (students) told me that it was very difficult, and they told me that….. now this is coming from the ones that talk, now some students are always going to say a test is difficult, but the guys are the ones that are scoring in the 90th percentile and up, when they are coming back saying "what in the world was that?", when in MAP testing they test at extraordinarily high levels, and are doing things like trigonometry, if they are coming back and telling me "that was absolutely ridiculous."

These thoughts did not change after the second round of PARCC testing. Doug experienced frustration through the entire process of the test. He attempted to familiarize his students with the technology and interface that they would need for the test. By his account they spent "hours of class time" going over how to take the test. The problem was that the interface on the actual test did not match the practice test. Doug said "the tools that they were having to use, they had no idea how to use them, and that is after 3 hours of practice, and that's not….. they were just flat out different." During the administration of the actual test this led to "they (students) say 'I don't know how to use that tool' then I have to look and say that … .well go ahead and do what you can." He summed the experience up saying "Our kids got ambushed, come clean on some sort of, what is expected, what is success, but I just they that they are saying… well they are setting up a lot of schools for failure."

After going through the experience of PARCC, both Michelle and Doug had the same perception of PARCC and the Common Core State Standards. They are both behind the standards and feel confident that over time their students will be able to adapt to them. However neither of them found any use for PARCC. Doug characterized this by saying "I am 100% behind Common Core, and 0% behind PARCC. Common Core breaks down standards for the

students and assures that the same thing is not being taught every year." His perception of PARCC was that it served no useful purpose and was simply a source of frustration for his students. He believed that "if all of my students can do everything on that test (PARCC) then they may as well just skip their time here and move straight to college, they are too good for high school". Michelle had a similar view, being in favor of the Common Core Standards but not seeing a value in PARCC. She also added the observation that "the majority of the issues people are having are with PARCC, not the Common Core, in the media the two have been put together and most people don't distinguish the difference."

Age and Developmental Appropriateness

In the review of related literature, the question of viability was addressed. Viability was still an area of great contention among practitioners. Without an extensive field test and feedback from ground-level educators there was no indication whether or not the newly implemented standards would be age and developmentally appropriate for the students that would be subjected to them. Throughout the course of the study some participants underwent a shift in their perceptions of this question, while others did not change.

Samantha was the single teacher that believed the standards were appropriate for her students at the start of the year and still believed the same after working with them for the entire year. At the start of the year she characterized her opinion saying "it seems like the standards are going to work out just fine". She echoed this mid-year and concluded the year in saying "for the majority of my students, the standards seemed age and developmentally appropriate."

Michelle believed that the fourth grade math standards are on point, but took issue with the reading standards. She pointed out that in the aligned literature there were passages that had "irony and sarcasm weaved in the story and fourth graders do not get sarcasm at all, they do not

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know how to use it and when they do it is mean and all they do is end up insulting each other." She understood that there were going to be growing pains during the transition in the upper grades, but felt that "some of the new stuff is too challenging". This was consistent with her views at the end of the school year. This time she added that "reading is so vague, I feel that reading is so relative, summarizing one type of text is very different for each kid."

This led to a reversal of Michelle's thoughts at the start of the year. Initially she believed that her work and academic history would lead her to great success with the reading standards, but anticipated struggles in implementing math. In August she said "in math I have to be cognitively more focused, I think about every single second of the lesson, because math is not something that comes naturally to me." Another worry Michelle had was "it's conceivable that I am going to have to reason through twenty four different answers to the same problem depending on what the students come up with." However she did emphasize it was not the content that worried her, but rather teaching it to her students in saying "Math is something that I can do for myself, getting it across to others is not my strong suit." After completing the year Michelle believed that she had more success with the clearly defined math standards and believed that the reading standards themselves needed some revisions, but she needed to rethink her approach for the following year.

These two perceptions varied from the other participants. They went from either a negative or noncommittal perception to an overall positive outlook on how the standards match student ability.

Erica has been working with the standards for two years. She began implementing them during the 2013-2014 school year. She expressed concerns about student birthdays and student age at the start of the school year. In kindergarten she has found that if they start when they are

young, they will struggle. She has found that if they enter at a young age, they are struggling to

keep up with the class until they are around 5 1/2 . After the students reach that age, she

observed that "they mature and something starts to click." This year she had a large class with

diverse academic ability. After seeing this class develop over the year she believed that as the

kids matured they would be able to meet the kindergarten standards. In looking at the class she

made this observation after the spring MAP testing, "I mean the two youngest are the two lowest

in the entire class, but are they are grade level? Yes, they are lowest, but they are at grade level."

Jean expressed perhaps the strongest reservations about the new standards. In the fall she

stated:

> my real problem is that who are these people to say what we must do in this grade? I'm
> wondering who is playing God out here and why do they think they have the know how
> to know exactly what each kid should know and when they should know it?

She expanded on this later by adding:

> To me school is about you doing the best you can, making a well-rounded child and if
> they meet the mastery of this common core objective they think that they are going to just
> have it forever, do you remember everything that you have ever learned?

Jean's perceptions changed greatly over the course of the year. When discussing math

standards Jean stated that "well, when you look at them there are only two or three here that I see

we didn't cover." At the time of the interview there were approximately four weeks left in the

school year. She anticipated that those would be covered during that time. When asked for an

overall summary of her experience, and if the standards were too much for her students, her final

assessment of them was "now that I look back at it, it's really not that many."

Erin had similar concerns. The concept of subject mastery and moving on without a

chance to review throughout the year worried her. She expressed this in saying:

> not every student is going to get there, it's not happening and it bothers me that there's
> not review. The way I read it is once you've done that, it goes over here and we move

on, assume it's mastered and we don't need to do it again. Well if you never go back to it, you're going to forget it.

In May that perception changed to "I think for second grade, yes they are appropriate but the testing was not". She echoed some of the concerns of Erica in that the younger students did experience difficulties at the start of the year. Erin has taught the same grade in the same school system for 43 years. She has seen a great deal of change in that time and multiple changes in the Illinois Learning Standards. When asked "many people think that there is a limit to what kids can learn at certain ages, you are not going to teach algebra to a third grader, have the standards hit that yet?", her response was "if not, we are getting close to it. I think that we need to let kids be kids and enjoy learning, I don't think that they do that as much as they used to."

It is also worth noting that Elizabeth had no qualms about the new learning standards in Pre-K. Her Pre-K program is grant-funded from the state. That means that in order to maintain their funding they are required to do certain things. Their curriculum must be standards-based. She also explains that when she was completing her undergraduate teacher training, almost ten years prior, the early childhood programs were already using standards. Standards-based instruction was all that she had ever known or practiced. The biggest change that she has undergone was when the state of Illinois occasionally modified the standards. Her program has never, as long as she has been involved in it, undergone a change like the K-5 teachers are experiencing. For that reason she was mentioned here and not along with Samantha, who experienced no reservations during the changes.

Curricular Leadership

The curricular leadership at the building level was a theme that was brought up multiple times and by every participant. The teachers were appreciative of the work that the administrators in the district had done to assist them with the changes this school year.

Samantha said that the principal had been her main source of information regarding the Common Core State Standards and using them in her room. She described this as being "extremely helpful". Melissa had found that the principal had "been great in helping me locate resources and getting me what I need." Erin concurred by stating that "our principal has been very good about bringing them (CCSS) and giving us resources for them." Elizabeth's perception was similar to those mentioned above, but she also added that the principal "always reminds us that your first priority is to teach the kids in your classroom."

Doug could be described as probably being the teacher who was the most proactive in the adoption of the standards. As described previously, he changed the way he planed for the students and how he assessed them. In his move to issue standards based report cards in math he said the principal was "very supportive." He also stated that in his opinion the principal "took a look at not just implementing in the classroom, they have a much more macro view on how to get all of this accomplished."

Michelle was new to the building this year but brought a perspective that was missing in the other participants. Her first two years of teaching, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012 school years, took place in a suburban school district in Missouri. Even though the Common Core Standards had just been introduced, the district was actively working on integrating them into the curriculum. That district made the decision to be proactive with the new developments and began to work at on their immediate adoption. She was there as the district began the process of shifting their focus from the Missouri standards, which she was taught in her undergraduate teacher training, to the CCSS.

Her next two years, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 school years, were in a rural district similar to this one where the principal "didn't know anything about it, (CCSS) and that makes it

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hard to educate others. There was no leadership from the top saying this is what we are doing. I

had already been working on this so it was like stepping back in time." Michelle became quickly

discouraged when she realized "there was no direction, no assistance, it was just a mess."

Michelle further characterized this change in saying:

> I think that different expectations in different buildings and districts is something
> that you expect, there are going to be changes, but seeing these differences when we are
> all supposed to be doing the same thing was really a shock.

Michelle saw a major difference in the academic leadership that was present in this

building and compared it favorably to the leadership in the suburban school district. When asked

to expand on that she says "I walked into this building and was told that we are implementing the

Common Core, here's what we are doing, and here's how you start." Michelle further described

the implementation in more details saying "there is a clearly defined direction we are going and

the path we are going to take to get there" and "the whole project has been spearheaded by the

principal."

She further described the principal as someone who proactively located resources for the

teachers, made sure that the teachers had the tools they needed in their rooms to be successful

and found a way to help them that was not perceived as overbearing and was not perceived as

dictating terms of instruction to the teachers. To her the last part is very important. She

characterized the building leadership in this way:

> I want to be trusted to do my job, I know some people can't be trusted to do that, not so
> much here, but there are also a lot of overbearing principals out there, that's definitely not
> the experience that I've had here.

Based on observations and descriptions of the staff, the principal's leadership style appears to be

that of an initiator (Rutherford, Hord & Huling, 1984). The building leadership was not a focus

of this study, but the perceptions of the teachers were such that they considered the curricular

leadership at the building level important to their success. This is an area that warrants further study and will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

SOCQ 75 Data

As detailed in Chapter 3, the participants were given an SOCQ 75 instrument at the start of the school year and the same instrument was administered in the spring. These were scored and analyzed to look for patterns of teacher concern as well as any movement in their perception for the year. The raw data is included below in Table 4.2 (Fall Scores) and Table 4.3 (Spring Scores)

Table 4.2

SOCQ 75 Scores from Fall 2014

	Stage 0	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Stage 6
Elizabeth	10	24	26	25	24	26	21
Erica	12	23	26	23	22	26	22
Samantha	14	20	19	16	19	18	9
Jean	14	14	17	13	20	15	10
Erin	17	24	26	29	27	24	27
Melissa	10	22	18	14	23	28	19
Michelle	10	20	20	20	20	18	10
Doug	16	15	20	18	18	21	20
Total	103	162	172	158	173	176	138
Average	12.875 (13)	20.25 (20)	21.5 (22)	19.75 (20)	21.625 (22)	22 (22)	17.25 (17)
Percentile	75	72	78	77	38	55	52

Table 4.3

SOCQ 75 Scores from Spring 2015

	Stage 0	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5	Stage 6
Elizabeth	10	27	20	27	26	25	23
Erica	12	20	22	17	30	27	19
Samantha	11	15	19	21	24	23	23

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Jean	21	26	18	16	17	16	14
Erin	12	23	26	24	23	27	22
Melissa	11	24	19	13	25	22	18
Michelle	11	13	13	13	16	20	18
Doug	10	16	18	20	21	20	15
Total	98	164	155	151	182	180	152
Average	12.25 (12)	20.5 (21)	19.375 (19)	18.875 (19)	22.75 (23)	22.5 (23)	19 (19)
Percentile	69	75	70	73	43	59	60

In looking at the collected group data, there is a change in every category over the course of the year. The changes appear to concur with the data gathered during the interview sequence.

- Stage zero (Unconcerned) dips slightly but is still one of the higher percentiles. This indicates that the individuals are "not concerned with the innovation" (George, Hall and Stiegelbauer, 2013). During the interviews there was little concern expressed about the Standards themselves; the majority of the concerns were about logistics and management issues which are expressed in stage three.

- Stage one (Informational) increases slightly over the year. This indicates that the participants want to know more about the innovation (George et al., 2013). This was expressed in many different ways, usually by participants saying that they wanted to know more about a particular subject, usually math, before the start of next year.

- Stage two (Personal) decreased over the course of the year. A high stage two "suggests that respondents have intense personal concerns about the innovation and its consequences for them" (George et al., 2013, p. 53). George et al. (2013) later also explains that "although these concerns reflect uneasiness regarding the innovation, they don not necessarily indicated resistance" (p. 53). The drop in this catergory indicates that the participants became more at ease with the changes that they are experiencing over the

course of the year. The second point made by George et al. (2013) was also borne out from both the interviews and classroom observations. Even though the SOCQ instrument documented some personal concerns, there was resistance expressed or observed during the other two data collection methods.

- Stage three (Management) is also elevated, but did decrease over the year. When stage three is high it indicates that the participants have "concerns about logistics, time and management" (George et al., 2013, p. 53). This indicates that the participants became more at ease with the time concerns over the course of the year, but still had some concerns about how the Common Core Standards were going to fit in their daily classroom curriculum. As in stage zero, part of this elevation can be explained by the fact that all the teachers were already planning ahead for changes they were going to implement for the 2015-2016 school year. That will be discussed in further detail in the stage six analysis.

- Stage four (Consequence) was consistently the lowest, although it did increase slightly over the course of the year. When stage four is low it "suggests that the person has minimal concerns about the effects of the innovation on students" (George et al., 2013, p. 53). One teacher, Erin, expressed concerns about the impact that the standards would potentially have on her students. During the first interview she wondered if all of the standards were going to begin to make students resist school and take the fun out of learning by saying "we need to let kids be kids and enjoy learning, I don't think they do as much as they used to." During the first SOCQ her score in stage four was the highest. Over the course of the year, not only did her score in stage four drop, but four teachers ended the year with higher scores than she had. After using the CCSS, Erin was a bit

more at ease with them, but was still wary of the long-term impact on the students. She feels that the standards have reached the point at which second graders are not going to be able to comprehend more and added "if we are not there yet, we have to be extremely close".

- Stage five (Collaboration) is also one of the lower stages. In a small building there are often problems with collaboration with one class per grade level. These issues are discussed in greater detail earlier in this chapter under the emerging theme of isolationism. It is interesting to see that the score did increase slightly over the course of the year. The average score in the fall was 22 while the spring score was 22.5. The participants are still working on adapting to the standards in their own grade level. They are having problems collaborating with other teachers in the building because they are not confident in what they are doing yet. That does not mean that the teachers do not work together. All the teachers are willing to work together and try to establish a team effort. One specific example of this was the initiation of the Daily 5 for reading. The teachers as a group decided that this would be something they wanted to begin for the 2014-2015 school year, and it was implemented in grades K-6.

- Stage six (Refocusing) goes up over the course of the year. This stage is concerned with how "the individual focuses on exploring ways to reap more universal benefits from the innovation, including the possibility of making major changes to it or replacing it with a more powerful alternative" (George et al., 2013, p. 8). No one mentioned replacing the standards, as it was not an option, but all of the teachers in some form or another mentioned how they were looking to add changes for the 2015-2016 school year based on their experiences during the 2014-2015 school year. The majority of these plans revolved

around the math curriculum. The success of the Daily Five reading program led many

teachers to plan on implementing the Daily Three. The other area of looking ahead was

the issue of alignment. The math curriculum they have is aligned to the old Illinois

Learning Standards. This has led them to obtain resources on their own and get resources

out of the old curriculum from grades above and below them.

Overall the SOCQ 75 instrument demonstrated a positive attitude of the teachers in respect to the

implementation of the Common Core State Standards. It also demonstrates movement through

the year. These descriptions and changes align with the information that was gained from the

participants during the three-interview sequence.

Documented Changes in Perceptions

Over the course of the year there were numerous shifts in the perceptions of the teachers.

As mentioned in the previous section, the SOCQ 75 instrument documented changes in

perceptions in the staff as a group. There are also cases of participants' perceptions that need

further study and discussion.

Erin began the year with caution. In August she said "I'm really struggling with

Common Core". The biggest issue she was encountering was that she said "not every students is

going to get there, it's not happening and that bothers me." She was also worried about the lack

of review that seemed to be built into the standards. She believed that "since that was done in

first grade, I don't have time to and I won't be going back to review it." At the same time she

believed that she was prepared for the upcoming year, but she was not convinced that it was

going to go well.

Erin was also questioning the age and developmental appropriateness of the standards.

She has 43 years of experience in the same district teaching all in the same grade level. During

that time she has seen students with a wide variety of abilities come through her room. She believed that "I think some kids will get it (meet standards) but I don't know about the majority". When asked further Erin stated that "maybe I will get to half (meeting standards)".

In May, Erin was again asked if she felt that the Common Core Standards were age and developmentally appropriate for second graders. This time her response was "I think for second grade, yes they are appropriate, but the testing was not." The MAP test data shows that her half of second grade is lower than its counterpart, yet Erin's students still managed to do well on final MAP and had three-quarters of her class met the standards which she initially felt would be over the heads of many of her students. Her own perception was that "most of the kids in her class kept up with what she was expecting." Additionally, Erin was asked what she wanted to do differently for next year and she said that she wanted to find "things I could do to challenge the kids."

Erin's view on testing is complicated. She did not teach a grade that that was given the PARCC, rather she is referring to the MAP testing that was done three times a year. The MAP test adjusts based on the answers a student gives. She saw her students get extremely frustrated when they began getting math questions about angles. Here is how she described the spring test: "The kids were getting frustrated, extremely frustrated. Not only that, there were words they didn't know and kept coming to me asking 'what is this word?', and I can't tell them, that is extremely frustrating as well."

She remembered when the only test given was one that the teachers gave at the end of the year and scored themselves. The results were not used by the school or to make value judgments about her performance. It was only for her to look at to assess how the year went. Erin did not express a problem with testing per se, but rather her perception that testing is becoming more of

the focus of school and not learning. In her opinion, "each year we test a little more and teach a little less." She also believed that this has been picking up lately primarily "the last ten years, maybe a little more, but the last ten years is where you really see it (testing) pick up" and "PARCC has really scared people, it has grabbed the public's attention." Erin also believes that "there are good things in Common Core, but PARCC is definitely not one of them".

Her main objection to the outbreak of testing, other than it occupying too much time in school, is that perceived this as having negative consequences on the students. She believed that the standards treated all of the students as if they were the same. She expressed this by saying "while kids are kids, they aren't defined like elements, they are all the same this, there is so much variation". She also expressed her philosophy of "not teaching for a test, we should be teaching a child". Erin also believed that all of the changes coming at once (PARCC, Common Core, Danielson Evaluations) is "putting pressure on the teacher, and that transfers down to the kids. They pick up on the nerves and pressure that is coming from everywhere."

While undergoing a perception change and having an overall positive experience for the 2014-2015 school year, Erin did find some problems with the Common Core State Standards. At the beginning of the year she said, "there are learning gaps in here." When asked what she meant she expanded on it saying "the students need to know things before we can teach the new material. They don't have it". In January she said "the holes are really there, it's not that they just aren't doing it, or pretending not to know it to get out of something." This perception was expressed by the fourth and fifth grade teachers as well. They believed that as Common Core was fully implemented for an extended period of time these gaps would disappear as every standard prior to their grade level had been covered with each student. It will take some time to determine if that is the case or not.

In reflecting on the year, Erin also stated that she did not totally transform her curriculum or instruction. She stated with the belief that, "I have the background that knows what a second grader needs to know." From there Erin approached the year saying, "I had everything I needed to get started and went from there". Her biggest concern was "trying to fit it all in". She said she kept saying to herself, "I know that we need to be doing this, and then we need to be doing that."

Jean began the year in a similar fashion as Erin. She also was not "sold" on the idea of the Common Core State Standards for her students. Jean's main concern was also the amount of changes that teachers were experiencing at once. Going into the year she felt "there are so many things thrown at me at once that I'm doing a half-assed job at everything when I fell that I could do so much better if I was concentrating at one thing." Jean also observed that:

> Everyone always focuses on the new buzzword that comes out, then a new buzzword came out so we all went and focused on that, and the only one, then it went away. Now it just seems like there are tons of buzzwords, RTI, Common Core, PERA, Danielson, I just feel like I am being pulled in a bunch of different directions.

When specifically asked if she perceived the Common Core State Standards as being age and developmentally appropriate she quickly answered "No". She expands on that explaining:

> my real problem is that who are these people to say that this is what they must do? In this grade? I want to know who is playing god out here and why do you think that you have the knowhow to know exactly what each kids should know and when they should know it?

Jean then expands further saying "to me school is about doing the best you can to build a well rounded child, and if they meet mastery along the way great". Her other main problem was with the concept of mastery. Jean said "they believe that you are going to have this forever because it has been drilled into your head 5,000 times. Do you or anyone remember everything you have ever learned?".

With those perceptions going into the year, Jean was asked what she was doing differently to prepare for the year. She said "I'm planning the same, other than working in the Daily Five." A main reason for this was because the building principal had been wanting them to have standards-based lessons "for about two years now".

In January, Jean was again asked how the year was going in regards to the standards. She characterized herself by saying "I'm exhausted, it's just so busy". She said that the students seemed to be working well with the standards, but for her there was a lot of work involved to get where she felt everything needed to be. Jean also described the standards as "causing me angst, but I'm adapting to them just fine."

Jean also mirrors Erin's goal as a teacher. She believes that "they just need to be a well-rounded child and they need to be able to be happy and function in the world, and that's what I'm trying to do".

In May the final interview took place and Jean was much more at ease with the standards. One of the major perceptional shifts was on the question of age and developmental appropriateness. Initially she believed that the standards were unreachable for many of her students.

Looking back at her perceptions over the course of the year, Jean sums up her Common Core experience, saying:

> I think that it's just such a big thing, it's like when you are going to clean your house, you just hate to start it, but once I start it and do it, it wasn't as bad as I was expecting. I also think that is true of all things, this just looked so intimidating at first.

As the year was ending she also stated that "When I look back I guess it wasn't as bad as it seemed, but when you're that person in that situation it was overwhelming."

Jean ended the year with positive feelings about what she had experienced. One reason for this change is that she kept a positive outlook for the entire school year. From her experiences she observes "if the teacher isn't happy the kids will pick up on it, and at this age it can make all the difference." She also feels confident that she will be much better prepared next year after living this experience. Upon self-reflection Jean said the one thing she plans to concentrate on next year is "more writing in all subject areas."

It is also important to take a closer look at Elizabeth's perceptions of the CCSS and their implementation statewide. She stated that she has had no real problems implementing the learning standards since she has been using them since her undergraduate teacher training. She stated that:

> I believe in, and I feel that early child hood is fairly new enough that they are kind of ahead of the game in the sense that we are already doing RTI and we are already doing Common Core, it's integrated into the curriculum that we were being taught.

She expanded that later in repeating some of her points but also adding:

> I feel like that's kind of the swing of things, and they (Her undergraduate professors) pushed us toward it already, instead of being trained in something else and then the state implementing a new program, so really early childhood is ahead of the game when it comes to RTI and standards, it's been there since the beginning because we are teaching multiple levels of students with the different ages.

These statements emphasize the mindset that Elizabeth brought into the year. She learned standards-based instruction during her undergraduate teacher-training program and has been using it for the past six years. While other teachers were anticipating or planning major changes based on the standards, she was experienced in this and fully prepared for the transition.

This does not mean that she feels the standards are perfect. She does believe that each school and district should be able to customize the standards to a certain extent to meet the needs

of their students. When asked if she believes that there are areas of the standards that she would

like to change she replied:

> Yeah I feel like as far as the gross motor time, it's important, but it should be up to the district how much they a lot to it, because I feel like being in a rural area, our kids get to go outside and run, where in a city they might live in an apartment and might not be able to exercise, so that is something, but I know my students and know that they are doing things.

So while Elizabeth had an extremely positive outlook on the standards, she also did not believe

that the "one size fits all" nature of mandated standards is a perfect situation.

This preparation led to a very positive year for Elizabeth. When asked about any major

changes for her this year she replied "I mean the way I do this (teach) has never changed, the

system I use has changed, but the way the assessment, the type and how I look for assessment

has never changed". The system she was referring to was the state- mandated method of

documenting progress in her students.

As far as instruction goes she is able to operate the same way that she learned in her

undergraduate teacher training. This leads to a great sense of ease in approaching the changes

and designing her lessons for the year.

Research Questions

The research question, and two sub-questions that guided this study were set out in

Chapter One. They were:

1. How does the mandated policy of the Common Core State Standards influence teachers
   as evidenced by their experiences?

   a. How do teachers perceive the adoption of the Common Core State Standards
      influencing their professional practice?

b. How does a teacher's educational level and past experiences effect their

perceptions of the Common Core State Standards?

In examining the data gathered for question one, this case study documented the influence that the CCSS and PARCC put on the teachers. Every teacher discussed changes that they implemented for the 2014-2015 school year.

For sub-question A there were a variety of responses. Every teacher reported different adaptations to the CCSS and PARCC. Even though the responses were different for each teacher, there were some general categories that the CCSS influenced changes fall into. Those categories can broadly be defined as:

- Schedule Changes – The teachers changed their schedule to emphasize Reading and Math. One strategy that was broadly adopted was combining Science and Social Studies into Reading and Math.

- Planning Changes – The teachers emphasized planning to meet the specific CCSS that needed to be covered throughout the year. This led to extensive unit and year-long planning.

- Curriculum Changes / Creation – The teachers did not have a math curriculum that was aligned to the CCSS. This led to a great deal of individual work by the teachers to find resources and align them to meet the standards that were specific to their grade level.

- Implementation of the Daily Five – In grades K-5 the teachers decided to implement the Daily Five for literacy instruction. They believed that it would blend well with the CCSS and allow them to better meet the needs of all students.

Each of these changes were implemented differently at different grade levels. However, it is important to note that all of the teachers implemented some changes on this list, with most of

them implementing all. The details of the changes were documented previously in this chapter, and will be discussed further in chapter five.

Sub-question B, concerning a teacher's past experiences and education and how those potentially effect a teacher's perceptions of the CCSS, is more nuanced than Sub-question A. Table 4.2 details the educational history, work history and experience of the teachers in the study.

There were some generalizations that could be made concerning teachers' education, experience and perceptions of the CCSS and PARCC. The first factor considered was graduate work and how that potentially influenced a teacher's perceptions. In the study there were only two teachers that had completed graduate school, and they earned their MA degrees forty-one years apart from each other. Doug began his graduate school program in January of 2015. The lack of teachers with a graduate degree, and the lack of similarities between those that had earned degrees did not allow for any conclusions to be reached concerning graduate school and teacher's perceptions of the CCSS and PARCC.

The next factor to consider as a factor concerning teachers' perceptions of CCSS, PARCC and their professional practice was where the teachers underwent their undergraduate teacher training. Out of the eight teachers, three earned their undergraduate degrees from a state university, and five earned their degrees from a Liberal Arts College. Three of the five teachers graduated from the same Liberal Arts College located twenty miles from the school.

The three teachers who graduated from a state school, two different colleges in Illinois and one in Kansas, are some of the younger teachers in the district. Erica and Samantha each have five years of experience and Melissa has two years of experience. All of them had positive perceptions of the CCSS throughout the length of the case study.

The five teachers that graduated from Liberal Arts Colleges were the teachers at the school with more experience. Elizabeth, Doug and Michelle have seven, six, and five years of experience respectively. Doug and Elizabeth both graduated from the University that is twenty minutes away from the school. The two most experienced teachers in the district, Jean and Erin, also graduated from Liberal Arts colleges. Those two experienced teachers also underwent a change in perception over the course of the year. Those were discussed in in the previous section. Their teacher training does not seem to have had as much of an effect on their perceptions as much as their experience.

The third area this question covered was the experiences a teacher has had and if those potentially had an influence on their perceptions of the CCSS.

The two teachers with the most experience, Jean and Erin, underwent the greatest change in perceptions regarding the CCSS. They both ended the year on a positive note, improving both their perceptions of practice, and the standards themselves. At the start of the year, they both felt as if the age and developmental appropriateness of the standards was in question for their students. At the end of the 2014-2015 school year, they both felt that the standards were in fact appropriate for their grade level, and that they would be well prepared for using these standards in the 2015-2016 school year. Both of these participants' perceptions were detailed earlier in this chapter.

Elizabeth had been working with standards ever since she began teaching, back to her undergraduate training. She stated that standards were all that she ever knew, and adapting to the updated standards was not a challenge at all to her. She welcomed the changes and felt that everyone else would as well once they became used to them.

Michelle had a variety of experiences leading up to this year. She felt that her first job in Missouri, where the school district was actively integrating the CCSS, was a great benefit to her. That helped her while she was in the district that was ignoring the CCSS and not implementing them at all, and allowed her to seamlessly pick up this year and integrate into the building's academic plan.

All of the other teachers are relatively new to the profession, with Doug having six years of experience, both Erica and Samantha having five years of experience, and Melissa with two. All of these teachers had positive perceptions toward the CCSS and found ways throughout the year that they were planning on implementing more of the standards for the 2015-2016 school year.

Of the four, Doug was the most positive toward the CCSS. He repeatedly stated that he was "100% behind Common Core" and that view became stronger as the year went on. Doug changed his classroom approach to more closely align to the Common Core expectations. He switched to standards-based report cards and individualized instruction for students based on where they were with the standards.

Along the same lines, his views on PARCC became less positive as the year continued. He began as apprehensive mainly because there was little information available to teachers concerning the test and that PARCC was untested. Once the test was actually given, his perceptions of the test deteriorated. He found the technology frustrating, especially since the practice test had a completely different access platform than the actual PARCC test. He stated that both he and his students were frustrated with the PARCC and questioned the value of taking it.

The totality of Melissa's experience with the CCSS had been in this school district. She was only two years removed from college, but in her undergraduate teacher preparation program she was not taught about the standards or how to implement them in her classroom. She was told, "When you get a job you will learn about these standards". Additionally, while this was only her second year of teaching, it was also her second different grade assignment. Melissa taught kindergarten last year and this was her first year in second grade. Some of her qualms about the CCSS this year were due to the grade change, not to the standards themselves. At the end of the year, she found that she was able to use the standards effectively and had a positive outlook for next year, believing that with a year of experience with the CCSS, the 2015-2016 school year would be better. A portion of this positive perception was that before the final interview with Melissa she found out that she would not be changing grades for next year; she would remain in second grade.

In summary, the participants in this study ended the year with positive perceptions of the CCSS and believed that their experiences this year would allow them to better implement the standards next year. While a participant's graduate school experience or undergraduate teacher training location do not seem to have been a factor in their perceptions, their experience did have an influence in their initial perceptions of the CCSS entering the 2014-2015 school year. The teachers who have been teaching the longest entered the year more apprehensive than the teachers with less experience, and underwent the greatest shift in perceptions to a positive experience with positive expectations for the 2015-2016 school year.

While the location of undergraduate teacher training did not seem to have an effect on teachers' perceptions, it is worth noting the case of Elizabeth, she believed that her undergraduate teacher training gave her a great advantage with the new standards. She was a

Pre-K teacher, and in Illinois there have been detailed early learning standards much longer than there have been detailed standards in grades K-12, as there now are with the CCSS. Elizabeth felt that learning the standards and practicing the standards in her pre-service and student teaching was greatly beneficial to her in preparing her to work with the newly implemented standards.

As a strategy to facilitate and better understand the implications of practice for teachers during this complicated year, the district piloted a new in-service structure centered on professional practice and improving the teachers' classroom performance. As mentioned multiple times by the participants in this study, they commonly experienced a sense of isolationism in their job from being the only person in the district doing that job, and a sense of frustration that the 2014-2015 school year introduced a number of changes (CCSS, PARCC, New Teacher Evaluations) into their professional practice, often causing them to experience frustration about the amount of major shifts in expectations at one time.

To accomplish this, the school planned and participated in a collaboration with the neighboring school district concerning the CCSS and PARCC. The meeting was organized by grade. Similar grade levels and the teachers were given various topics to discuss concerning the CCSS, PARCC and what they are doing in their classrooms to adjust to the changes this year. The groups that were set were:

- Pre-K

- Kindergarten and First

- Second and Third

- Fourth, Fifth and Sixth

These were established based on varying criteria. In the first two interviews it was learned what grades seemed to be most similar in what they were doing. Additionally, the number of teachers in each building was taken into account. This kept the groups small and there were three groups of five, with the Second and Third Grade group having six teachers participating.

In the final interview, the teachers were asked about their perceptions of this in-service and if they thought it was something that they found beneficial to them in their practice. All of the teachers said that they believed this was beneficial to them, and was perhaps the best in-service that they participated in all year.

Erica characterized it in saying "I mean just looking at what other school districts are doing, I kind of just follow what, what they do like what [a neighboring district] is doing, I know that they have been doing it for a while, and they have a curriculum person that aligns it for them." She also said "it is reassuring to see what I am doing is similar to other districts, it makes me feel good about it."

Erin had a similar take on the in-service. She said "it is always good to see what everyone else is doing". She also liked seeing the resources that the other teachers had available to them. Erin said "I guess I found some actual books that have common core examples in them, resource books, those really helped. I've used those." Jean has similar perceptions of the in-service. She said:

> I enjoyed that, because you know you're so busy doing things that you don't always have time to come up with all these different things, and see things that work and talk about what don't work, like I said you're just trying to keep your head above water and just getting some more ideas

Jean also later stated that "when you talk with other teachers about what you do, that's never a waste of time."

Samantha found a similar benefit from the meeting. What she perceived as the biggest

benefit was:

> I think it was helpful that if something isn't working to be able to go over and say 'this
> isn't working, and I need to do something different, what is working for you? What did
> you do, how did it work? Why did it work? Things like that.

Samantha also stated that "I got ideas and assignments that I have already used in my room from

the other teachers, it was really helpful." Michelle had the same take away from the meeting.

She described it in saying:

> You just feel like you have a bunch of different resources that, and everyone has different
> ideas being able to turn any of these other people and ask them a question about it, and I
> know that they are going to have an answer for me.

Michelle also commented "it was nice to see that other teachers had the same ideas, and were

doing things similar to me".

Out of all of the teachers Elizabeth perhaps found the collaborative in-service the most

helpful. During the interview sequence she expressed the strongest isolationist feelings of all the

teachers. This arose from the fact that she was the only one in the building that works with the

Early Learning Standards, and had a schedule that was different that all of the other teachers due

to her class structure and the requirements of her state grant. Elizabeth stated that what she liked

best about the afternoon was:

> Just to talk about ideas, I thought that it was very beneficial, and the one thing that I did
> pick up was that [the other Pre-K teacher she met with] said that she looks at the early
> learning standards, as maybe her minimal expectations, so like letters, it's know some
> letters and their name, but they then go to kindergarten and they are supposed to know all
> of their letters. So I thought that was a good outlook, here is what you at least have to do,
> and anything past that is what we are shooting for

Elizabeth said that was something she is going to base her expectations on next year to see how it

worked for her classroom. Another learning experience that happened during the in-service was

that Elizabeth found out about a certification process that the state was trying to get all of their

Early Child Hood teachers to undergo. She said "another thing that I didn't know about was going back to school to get the ESL things. This year has been so busy, but this summer I think that I will be able to look into it and maybe start." Her counterpart from the other district was completing the program that semester and told her about the location and other details so that Elizabeth could begin process soon.

The idea of sharing their own experiences with people that are teaching the same grade level in a comparable district as well as networking with them for future communication was the biggest benefit that the teachers reported that they took away from the meeting. Many of them remained in contact with their counterpart for the remainder of the year, sharing ideas, success and failures they were experiencing. The success that the teachers from both districts reported had led to this type of in-service being scheduled twice, once in the fall and once in the spring, for the 2015-2016 school year.

The teachers perceived that the collaboration time and contacts that they made helped them this school year, and will assist them as they continue to develop strategies, curriculum and change their instruction to meet the demands of the CCSS and PARCC.

Summary

Both the three-interview sequence and the SOCQ 75 instrument showed positive attitudes toward the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Combining the two data sources created an overall picture of the teachers and their perceptions of the standards and their performance in their implementation. These two data sources aligned and together provided a more in-depth and nuanced view of the participants and their perceptions.

During the site visits, the participants were documented teaching their students and using the Common Core State Standards. Without exception, all teachers planned for the standards

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and delivered standards-based instruction. Additionally, they individually critiqued their performance in regards to the standards and how they were planning on improving instruction during the 2015-2016 school year. They shared their perceptions of their performance this year and their thoughts on self-improvement for next year. When the teachers were observed in practice, their positive attitudes and perceptions were exhibited.

The only hint of negativity toward the CCSS was seen with regard to the accompanying assessment, which in Illinois is PARCC. The teachers perceived that PARCC had taken over instruction in their daily practice. The fourth and fifth grade teachers believe that PARCC testing has become intrusive into the education that they want to give to their students. In second grade, the teachers believed that PARCC was looming over their practice and they are feeling a burden, starting with the first day of second grade, to prepare students for a test that the students will not be taking for over 18 months. This perception was also echoed as low as Pre-K and Kindergarten. Those teachers also had reservations about PARCC, a test that they were never going to have to personally experience their students taking and that they will never have to administer.

In a vacuum, the CCSS were perceived positively in all cases. When the CCSS were considered as a whole, including PARCC, PERA and other mandates implemented by the State of Illinois, there were some trepidation in the minds of the participants. Even considered as a whole, with PARCC and PERA included, the participants still viewed the CCSS as a positive change. The other changes simply kept the CCSS from getting the attention and proper evaluation that the standards deserve from not only the teachers, because their attention is split, but from the public at large.

All three data sources appeared to present the same themes and all three sources support the findings of the other and strengthen the validity of the study. All of the data sources indicate positive perceptions toward the CCSS, and the SoCQ instrument demonstrated that the participants' perceptions began positively and progressed throughout the year.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study recorded changes in perceptions of teachers in several areas. These were detailed in Chapter four. This study also found three areas of professional practice that could potentially be informed by this study. Finally, this study revealed three areas that could potentially benefit from additional research to augment the findings of this study as well as noted limitations of the study.

Research Questions

The research question, and two sub-questions that guided this study were set out in Chapter one. They were:

1. How does the mandated policy of the Common Core State Standards influence teachers as evidenced by their experiences?

   a. How do teachers perceive the adoption of the Common Core State Standards influencing their professional practice?

   b. How does a teacher's educational level and past experiences effect their perceptions of the Common Core State Standards?

The data gathered during the course of the research provided insight into the teachers' perceptions of the CCSS and how they are influencing professional practice. Details of these perceptions were provided in Chapter Four. Here the findings of Chapter Four will be elaborated on and analyzed.

For sub-question A, the research indicates that the CCSS have had a definite impact on the professional practice of teachers in this school district. At every level the teachers described specific instances where the CCSS have influenced their daily professional practice.

Direct observations as well as the participants' descriptions of their own experiences

from participants, the teachers all describe the standards as driving their instruction. With that

being said, it is important to note that even with the CCSS driving instruction, the participants do

not believe that this is necessarily a detriment to their professional practice or to the students; it

is actually quite the opposite.

The majority of the participants specifically stated that they believe the CCSS are a vast

improvement over the old Illinois Learning Standards. Those standards were extremely vague

and led to gaps in instruction. The teachers liked the fact that there is now more structure to each

grade level. Appendix C contains one example from the English Language Arts goals that

Illinois was operating under before the adoption of the CCSS. The old state goals did not outline

specific standards that the students needed to achieve, or even specify the grade in which those

skills would be accomplished. There were only the board categories of Early Elementary, Late

Elementary, Middle/Junior High School, Early High School and Late High School. Not only

were the grade levels somewhat vague, the learning goals were also vague and left a lot of

individual interpretation. This had led to some issues in this school district because there were

teachers that had constantly covered the same material in different grades.

This overlap often led to the students lacking in certain areas, while receiving a great deal

of instruction in others. The participants also believed that the standards would eliminate those

learning gaps and lead to smoother transitions as students move from grade to grade, because

now they have established what curriculum will be taught in each grade. Without a specific

outline or alignment, the teachers often found themselves teaching the things that they felt most

comfortable with, or that from experience they believed were the skills that belonged in their

grade.

As mentioned previously, the school district in which the study was conducted is a small rural district that typically has only one classroom per grade level. The district also is relatively stable in terms of teachers, not only in employment, but also in grade level. This means that from year to year the same teachers are usually in the same grade level. From the experience of previous years, these teachers know what to expect every year as the students enter their room.

As new teachers came in they began working in the district and teaching the grade level, including the goals and activities that they had learned either in undergraduate teacher training or a previous job. With the stability that the district has been lucky enough to experience, it was understood what was taught in each grade level, and all areas were covered. This was achieved through working with each other over a period of years. With retirements over the last five years, that continuity had been upset. The adoption of the CSS by the state of Illinois provided them with an opportunity to "reset" or "reboot" the curriculum across the grade levels. As the students begin in kindergarten and move through the school, it will be assured that they theoretically have recieved instruction in all of the standards that are required.

More than the transitions within the school, the teachers were hopeful that this would mean that students who moved into the district would be at the same level, or at least a similar level to the students that had been there the entire year. Each teacher had stories of students who moved into the district, either at the start of the year or during that year that were severely lacking in some standards that the other students who had been there the entire year had mastered. At the same time many of these stories also described the same students as mastering things that seemed not to fit with what the teachers were expecting.

The structure provided by the CCSS is something that the teachers appreciate. It is not hard to see how the specifics that are outlined in the CCSS are much clearer than the old Illinois

Learning Goals. These changes were positively received and implemented. Before the CCSS were implemented, even in a small district such as this, there were problems mapping the curriculum from grade to grade. The teachers commonly covered the same things in different grades. One of the reasons that this happened was because "it is what we have always done". These standards have streamlined the alignment process. While there is surely still some overlap in the curriculum, it has been greatly reduced.

If the participants believe that in their situation that the CCSS will facilitate grade transitions, then it should follow that teachers in larger districts with multiple classrooms per grade and/or multiple buildings in the district should also welcome this change. The structure should also assist students that are moving districts or moving buildings in a district, or even moving between classrooms in the same building. While every classroom in the country, district or building, will not be at the exact same spot on the same day, there should be more alignment than there was under the old Illinois Learning Goals. The teachers were hoping that within a year or two they would start to see the benefit of the more standardized structure with the students that switch schools, districts or even classes within the same building.

The PARCC assessment was the second major influence on the professional practice of the teachers that they experienced this year. The study indicates that the teachers perceive the CCSS themselves as a positive development in their professional practice. Unfortunately, the CCSS do not exist in a vacuum. Along with the adoption of those standards came the implementation of PERA and the PARCC assessment. These are three major changes that were implemented at nearly the same time.

If sound educational practice was used to implement these changes in the educational system, there likely would not the backlash that has been common throughout the year. The

teachers perceived that the sheer volume of changes that began with the 2014-2015 school year left them somewhat overwhelmed. If these changes had been implemented one at a time, with time given for the teachers to adopt to each before moving onto the next, the teachers would be much more at ease with, and be able to fully implement each innovation.

In this individual location, the academic leader of the building put the emphasis on implementing the CCSS this year while the other two innovations (PARCC and PERA) were implemented, but not emphasized. This allowed the teachers to concentrate on doing one thing and doing it well. This management decision contributed to the positive perceptions, and the positive movement of those perceptions throughout the year. Building leadership was not a focus of this study, but it was a theme that was mentioned by the participants on numerous occasions, always in a positive light.

There were only two teachers in the study that participated in the actual PARCC assessment, but, the PARCC exerted influence on the teachers in Pre-K through Second Grade. While this study's focus was primarily on the CCSS, the PARCC assessment is an ancillary part of the CCSS. It is one of the changes that came along with the adaptation of the CCSS as one of the two assessments that have been adopted to monitor student learning under the CCSS.

While the teachers maintained positive perceptions of the CCSS, the PARCC did not share in those positive perceptions. The teachers felt that emphasis on testing, not just PARCC, was guiding their professional practice, rather than the students and their needs. This backlash, not only in Illinois, has led to planned changes to the PARCC for next year, including shorter tests and only one testing window. At a later date, a study will have to be conducted to determine how teachers believe these changes to PARCC fit in the classroom and influence their professional practice.

In Chapter 4 the teachers' perceptions of testing, PARCC in particular were detailed. In this district, all students, K-5, took the MAP and grades four and five took the PARCC. The teachers did not have strong feelings regarding the MAP. Everyone felt it was a good measure of student progress, and helped to guide instruction. The teachers also said that all of their students showed growth in multiple areas on the MAP. The only issue that was expressed was that the teachers, especially those in the younger grades, did not like how the test questions got harder when the students got right answers. The MAP also lowered the difficulty of the questions if the students did not begin the test well. If they missed the first three questions, then the test would self-correct and the questions would become easier. Again, this would prevent the test from presenting an accurate picture of the student's knowledge. These potential problems led many of the teachers to feel that structure of the test had the potential to frustrate the students and if that occurred, the test would not serve a useful purpose.

The overall perceptions of MAP were in stark contrast to the PARCC, of which no participants had a positive perception. Even Elizabeth in Pre-K felt that the PARCC was driving everything that happened in her classroom and the school.

The participants were very specific in their criticism of these changes. Once they began using the CCSS, their perceptions become more positive as the year progressed. This was in direct contrast to that of PARCC where perceptions became more negative as the year progressed.

The CCSS did not worry the participants. They commonly stated that there has to be some type of goal and standard; these are just the newest ones. They also believed that the CCSS were a vast improvement over the previous Illinois Learning Standards. The study suggests that if the only change that had been implemented this year was the CCSS, the

transition would have been much easier, and would have produced less backlash. In this district, and to a certain extent statewide and nationally, the outrage and political backlash was against a flawed assessment, PARCC, that was being instituted without widespread field testing, national norms or any type of history utilized to judge its validity as an assessment tool.

This backlash against testing spilled over into the CCSS and helped to shape the public perception about the standards, often assuming that they are one in the same. This is in contrast to Illinois where all of the criticism has been targeted at PARCC, independent of the CCSS. When superintendents or other groups have spoken out, they have narrowed the criticism to solely PARCC. The CCSS themselves have not been widely criticized as "ineffective" or "a disaster" as we are hearing from the leaders of other states.

If sound educational practice was used to implement these changes in the educational system, there likely would not the backlash that has been common throughout the year. If these changes had been implemented one at a time, with time given for the teachers to adopt to each before moving onto the next, the teachers would be much more at ease with, and be able to fully implement each innovation. In this individual location, the academic leader of the building put the emphasis on implementing the CCSS this year while the other two innovations were implemented, but not emphasized. This allowed the teachers to concentrate on doing one thing and doing it well. This contributed to the positive perceptions, and the positive movement experienced throughout the year. This is an aspect of building leadership that

There were only two teaches in the study that participated in the actual PARCC assessment. Even considering that fact, the PARCC exerted influence on the teachers in Pre-K through Second Grade. While this study's focus was primarily on the CCSS, the PARCC assessment is an ancillary part of the CCSS. It is one of the changes that came along with the

adaptation of the CCSS as one of the two assessments that have been adopted to monitor student learning under the CCSS with the other one being the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC).

The second sub-question concerned a teacher's education level and past experiences, and if those effected their perceptions of the CCSS. The participants had a wide range of experiences and educational backgrounds (table 4.1). Everyone reported positive perceptions and experienced positive movement throughout the year with regard to the CCSS. There did not appear to be any educational background or experience that led to an increase or decrease in teacher's acceptance and implementation of the CCSS.

This should not be interpreted as a definitive answer concerning a teacher's experiences or education and their perceptions of the CCSS. In this case, there was no overarching connection between a teacher's experiences or education and their perceptions. In a larger school there may indeed be a connection between these variables and the perceptions of the teachers.

In a small district, the academic leaders are able to have a much greater influence on educational practice. In addition, with a smaller number of teachers, the administrators are able to hire teachers that they believe will fit their academic vision and fit with the staff dynamic already in place. The current principal and superintendent hired seven of them of the nine participants in the study. The district's academic leaders have a positive perception of the CCSS, so it would stand to reason that the staff they hire would be expected to share those perceptions. In a district with a small number of faculty, it would be easier to find like-minded individuals than if they were hiring for a larger district or facility.

It also appears that the teachers that had been at the school the longest were individuals who had no problem adapting and were willing to implement new developments. This would

explain why they had been successful in an educational environment such as this, and had been employed for such an extended period of time. It also appeared that the influence of the newer teachers in the district had a positive influence, in terms of innovation and change, on the longer tenured teachers. This communal sense was insisted upon and fostered by the district administrators, and integrated fully by the staff, benefiting all of the teachers in the district.

The perceptions and actions of the administrators, specifically the building principal, were not a subject of this study. However, data gathered from the participants indicate that the academic leadership of the building is an area that is worthy of more study. This topic is discussed in more detail in both the sections titled "limitations" and "areas for future work" to follow.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study would indicate several possible implications for practice. These exist at both the building and university level.

Based on the perceptions of Elizabeth, detailed in Chapter four, it would appear that a strong teacher preparation program can have a lasting influence on teacher practice after graduation. Elizabeth was lucky to have an undergraduate teacher preparation program that stressed standards-based instruction and assessment before the Common Core State Standards had even begun being formed. That shaped her perceptions to allow her to seamlessly adjust to the new requirements as that state began implementing them.

It is vital that accrediting agencies and state boards of education give teacher preparation programs close scrutiny to assure that teacher preparation programs are instructing their students in the use of and assessment of the Common Core State Standards. While this would be a common-sense step in the implementation of these standards, in the teacher preparation

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programs of colleges and universities has not been the case. There are colleges and universities both public and private that have been producing graduates who are unprepared to work with and use the Common Core State Standards. Melissa graduated in 2012 and remembers what she learned about the Common Core State Standards. She describes it as being told, "this is coming up but the philosophy was that you will figure it out after you get a job."

This is in stark contrast to Elizabeth, who learned standards-based instruction during her entire teacher preparation program (Pre-K). That helps to explain some of the different perceptions that each had before and during the year. Elizabeth seamlessly adapted to the new standards and believed that all grades would eventually benefit from the new detailed standards. It is worth noting that Erica was also trained as a Pre-K teacher, more recently than Elizabeth, but her undergraduate teacher preparation program did not emphasize standards-based instruction and planning the way that Elizabeth experienced it. This in no way implies that Erica is anti-CCSS; quite the opposite, she feels positive about the changes. The fact that her teacher preparation program did not emphasize standards-based instruction and planning means that she (Erica) has more adapting to do when compared to Elizabeth, who completed a teacher preparation program to be certified to teach the same subject areas and grade levels in the same state.

The contrast in results shows that all teacher preparation programs are not created equal, and if there is hope for a successful implementation of the CCSS then Colleges and Universities need to ensure that they are training teachers work in the new educational environment. This does not mean to imply that students of education should only be taught standards-based instruction. Teacher preparation programs should continue to teach students sound educational

practices that have been shown to benefit students. Future teachers also need to be shown how to navigate the era of standards while still focusing on the students and their needs.

The second implication for practice points to the importance of the principal as the academic leader of the building. This study focused on the perceptions of the teachers in the building and did not interview any district or building level administrators. The perceptions of the teachers in regards to the academic leadership of the principal is an area that warrants further study and is discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

Without focusing on the principal's leadership, it was revealed that many of the teachers' perceptions of the principal's leadership was viewed as extremely positive and often credited for the success the teachers felt that they were having. Especially in a small environment, it would stand to reason that the building level leadership would have a large influence on teacher practice.

This thought process is especially apparent in the description that Michelle gives when she compares and contrasts her previous two years experience. She was in a district where there was no emphasis on the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the building principal never worked with the staff at all. For two years the sum of the curricular leadership she got was "try and make it more Common Core." She expanded on her perceptions of the situation saying "[he] didn't know anything, didn't educate himself on it, and that makes it hard to educate others. There was no leadership from the top saying this is what we are doing."

Michelle later compared this to the leadership in the current building, saying "the principal is spearheading the whole thing". Doug also has similar perceptions of the building leadership. His experience has been:

> My principal has done a fantastic job of being proactive, giving me tons of material, sending me links to follow, handouts, as you see my standards are right there next to you

(in a binder on the table), she finds materials to give to me, ways to kind of educate me on how to educate kids, she has really been the guiding force in getting things going, using them and talking about them

Similar things were also expressed by other teachers in the building. Melissa credited the principal with her knowledge and application of the standards in her room. She believes "the district has helped me more than anything, the principal has given me tools, she's printed out the standards so we have them and sending us links so that we have them but as far as before that, not much at all". As described earlier, Melissa was not trained on the Common Core Standards in college. She was told that she would figure it out after she was hired. Jean also was appreciative of the approach that the principal took. She said that the principal was hands-on in the process and described it as "the principal did a lot of work with us". While these perceptions may be unique to this setting, building leadership was mentioned enough times to warrant further work in this area.

The third area of practice worthy of discussion also occurred at the building level. It is something that the teachers found of use and can be implemented immediately with little cost and some planning. In order to alleviate some of the feelings of isolation that were described by the participants a combined in-service with a neighboring school district was conducted in an effort to expand the participants professional community. This strategy was implemented to address the concerns of the teachers that were expressed over the course of the year. As documented in chapter four, the teachers often expressed feelings of isolationism and uncertainty of practice. They do not have a large professional community in the district to draw from, especially in the elementary school.

This strategy was planned based on the responses from the teachers in the first two sets of interviews, as a way to combat the isolationist feelings, and expand their professional learning

community (PLC). The school district they collaborated with is approximately fifteen miles away and similar in nearly every demographic except free and reduced lunch, where the other school district was approximately twenty percent higher.

The results from this were overwhelmingly positive. Based on the perceptions of the teachers in the study, this was not a surprising result. They were looking for other professionals who were experiencing the same phenomenon as they were to network and find someone to share ideas with. Teachers are in a "people" profession and typically want to interact with others to share ideas, as well as tales of success and failure.

By expanding the professional circles of the participants, the district is working to replicate some of the benefits of working in a larger district that contains more teachers working in a similar assignment. The participants looked forward to the opportunity to collaborate with, and exchanges ideas and strategies with other teachers who have been working in a different building. They believed it was a valuable addition to their practice and felt that the extra points of view significantly contributed to their professional practice.

This strategy is going to be continued by the school districts in the future and is an area that is worthy of further study. It will be important to note if the positive perceptions will continue as the teachers become more comfortable with the CCSS and PARCC. It is conceivable that as the teachers become more comfortable with what they are doing, the value of such collaborations will decrease. It is also a possibility that this PLC will reach a saturation point and there will be a limit on the information that is shared. Both districts have an extremely stable staff of teachers. Over time it is possible that meeting on a regular basis will lead to the point at which they have discussed their approaches and techniques and until there are new

people hired, or other major developments, they amount of collaboration that is necessary or possible is greatly reduced.

Limitations

As stated in the title and mentioned many times, this study was conducted at a single site in a unit district located in rural central Illinois. The findings are accurate for this location but may not translate to other schools that are either rural or urban.

Additionally, there are other factors potentially at work here, which are going to be detailed in the following section for potential follow-up studies. These include:

- This building has stable academic leadership at both the district and the building level. This allows an academic vision to be formed and implemented over a period of years. With a consistent and stable administration, there are not yearly changes that filter down to the teachers.

- There is a remarkable stability in the faculty. Six of the eight teachers have never worked anywhere else. The other two (fourth and fifth grade) were originally from the area, got jobs elsewhere, and now have moved back. It is unlikely they will be leaving the district in the future.

  - The majority of the teachers are relatively new; seven out of nine teachers have under eight years of total experience. It should be noted that all of those teachers replaced faculty members who retired after working more than twenty years in the district. So while the stability may be questioned due to the relative inexperience of many staff members, the current staffing represents the historical trend of the district. The majority of the faculty is hired at the same time, work together for

decades and retire within a few years of each other, leading to great turn over every couple of decades, with extreme stability in between.

- Within the school there is a value of consistency. During the interviews both Jean and Erin talked about how they were having the children of former students. Erin also mentioned that grandchildren of some of her former students were now in school.

- Across the grade levels there is a sense of teamwork. As mentioned previously, the Daily Five was implemented across the grade levels for the 2014-2015 school year. The teachers in collaboration initiated that move as a way to improve literacy instruction. This was decided in Spring 2014 when the teachers were talking about CCSS implementation that fall. It was originally assumed that this was administrator led, only to find out that this curricular revision was teacher initiated. With a small faculty this is an essential quality for teachers in the building and a characteristic that is essential when hiring new staff.

These factors are present in the district but may not be present in all districts or schools. Additionally, this is a rural district that typically has one classroom per grade level with an occasional grade level split.

While this study may serve as a blueprint for future studies, it would be important to take these factors into account when attempting to duplicate the results or to implement change based on the result of this work.

Areas for Future Work

The focus of this study was on the teachers and how they perceived their professional practice in regards to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and PARCC.

The study was not focused on the perceptions, practice or approach of the building level administrators to the CCSS or PARCC.

A theme that emerged during the course of the study was that the work of the building level administrator appeared to influence the perceptions and implementation of the teachers. Future work should focus on the leadership and approach of the principal and also the perceptions of the teachers concerning the CCSS, PARCC and the effectiveness of the principal. This will enable will enable researchers to determine what if any influence the approach of building level administrators has on the perceptions and practice of the teachers in their building.

A second area that emerged as a potential topic for further study is the long-term perceptions and effectiveness of cross-district or cross-school grade level collaboration. As documented previously, the participating teachers found the time spent beneficial and useful in their daily practice. This lead to the district working on scheduling similar follow-up in-services for the 2015-2016 school year. This strategy has the potential to assist teachers in networking and finding new ways to adapt to the demands of the CCSS and PARCC. Initial positive perceptions and success do not indicate long-term gain. The potential benefits of this strategy employed over time is an area that is worthy of future study. One of the potential problems with this strategy is mentioned previously in this chapter. With a relatively stable staff, will this strategy retain its effectiveness over time? Is there a point at which this strategy will lose its effectiveness if there are relatively few new teachers hired with ideas to share, or new developments in the field of education?

The final area for potential work is to conduct a similar study in an urban setting or in a school that has multiple classrooms per grade. Ideally the setting would include different

demographics as well as a focus on teachers and their perceptions of their own practice as well as how they view the district and building leadership.

Conclusion

This study is a first step in documenting teachers' perceptions in regards to Common Core State Standards and PARCC during their first year of implementation. This was important due to the timing of the study. While the CCSS and PARCC will be around for years to come, there will only be one school year that is the first year of implementation of these two phenomenon in the state of Illinois. For this reason the timing of this study was important to document the teachers' perceptions and self reported adaptations to these changes during the initial implementation of these changes.

These initial perceptions and adaptations of the participants in this study have led to several recommendations for practice at the building, district, university and state level to improve teacher practice. The recommendations at the building and district level can be implemented in the short term with minimal systemic change. The recommendations at the university and state level will require more of a systemic change. It is believed that the Universities and State Agencies have begun these implementations. However, the process should be reviewed to ensure that implementation of the CCSS is being taught to future teachers, and the State Board of Education needs to ensure that the school districts are executing plans for the implementation and use of the CCSS and the administration of PARCC.

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Appendix A

SoCQ Instrument

Stages of Concern Questionnaire

Name (optional): _____

The purpose of this questionnaire is to determine what people who are using or thinking about using various programs are concerned about at various times during the adoption process.

The items were developed from typical responses of school and college teachers who ranged from no knowledge at all about various programs to many years' experience using them. Therefore, **many of the items on this questionnaire may appear to be of little relevance or irrelevant to you at this time.** For the completely irrelevant items, please circle "0" on the scale. Other items will represent those concerns you do have, in varying degrees of intensity, and should be marked higher on the scale.

For example:

This statement is very true of me at this time.	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	(7)
This statement is somewhat true of me now.	0	1	2	3	(4)	5	6	7
This statement is not at all true of me at this time.	0	(1)	2	3	4	5	6	7
This statement seems irrelevant to me.	(0)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please respond to the items in terms of **your present concerns,** or how you feel about your involvement with **this** innovation. We do not hold to any one definition of the innovation so please think of it in terms of your own perception of what it involves. Phrases such as "this approach" and "the new system" all refer to the same innovation. Remember to respond to each item in terms of your present concerns about your involvement or potential involvement with the innovation.

Thank you for taking time to complete this task.

0		1	2		3	4	5		6	7
Irrelevant		Not true of me now			Somewhat true of me now				Very true of me now	

Circle One Number For Each Item

1. I am concerned about students' attitudes toward the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
2. I now know of some other approaches that might work better.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
3. I am more concerned about another innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
4. I am concerned about not having enough time to organize myself each day.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
5. I would like to help other faculty in their use of the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
6. I have a very limited knowledge of the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
7. I would like to know the effect of reorganization on my professional status.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
8. I am concerned about conflict between my interests and my responsibilities.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
9. I am concerned about revising my use of the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
10. I would like to develop working relationships with both our faculty and outside faculty using this innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
11. I am concerned about how the innovation affects students.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
12. I am not concerned about the innovation at this time.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
13. I would like to know who will make the decisions in the new system.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
14. I would like to discuss the possibility of using the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
15. I would like to know what resources are available if we decide to adopt the innovation	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
16. I am concerned about my inability to manage all that the innovation requires.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
17. I would like to know how my teaching or administration is supposed to change.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
18. I would like to familiarize other departments or persons with the progress of this new approach.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Circle One Number For Each Item

19. I am concerned about evaluating my impact on students.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
20. I would like to revise the innovation's approach.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
21. I am preoccupied with things other than the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
22. I would like to modify our use of the innovation based on the experiences of our students.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
23. I spend little time thinking about the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
24. I would like to excite my students about their part in this approach.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
25. I am concerned about time spent working with nonacademic problems related to the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
26. I would like to know what the use of the innovation will require in the immediate future.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
27. I would like to coordinate my efforts with others to maximize the innovation's effects.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
28. I would like to have more information on time and energy commitments required by the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
29. I would like to know what other faculty are doing in this area.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
30. Currently, other priorities prevent me from focusing my attention on the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
31. I would like to determine how to supplement, enhance, or replace the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
32. I would like to use feedback from students to change the program.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
33. I would like to know how my role will change when I am using the innovation.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
34. Coordination of tasks and people is taking too much of my time.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
35. I would like to know how the innovation is better than what we have now.	0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Please complete the following:

1. How long have you been involved with the innovation, not counting this year?
   Never ___   **1 year** ___   **2 years** ___   **3 years** ___   **4 years** ___   **5 or more** ____

2. In your use of the innovation, do you consider yourself to be a:
   non-user ___   **novice** ___   **intermediate** ___   **old hand** ___   **past user** ____

3. Have you received formal training regarding the innovation (workshops, courses)?
   Yes ____   **No** ____

4. Are you currently in the first or second year of use of some major innovation or program other than this one?
   Yes ____   **No** ____

   If yes, please describe briefly:

   _____

   _____

   _____

   Thank you for your help!

Appendix B

Interview Protocol Alignment to Research Questions

Interview I Protocol Alignment to Research Questions
(August/September 2014)

1. How does the mandated policy of the Common Core State Standards influence teachers as evidenced by their experiences

   c. How do teachers perceive the adoption of the Common Core State Standards influencing their professional practice?
      i. How many years have you been teaching?
         1. Total
         2. Years here?
         3. Different grades and / or subjects that you have taught
      ii. What subject areas
         1. Do you consider your greatest strength?
         2. Your weakest?
      iii. What subject areas do you
         1. Believe you are the best at teaching?
         2. Feel you have the most room to grow in?
      iv. What made you want to be a teacher?

   d. How does a teacher's educational level and past experiences effect their perceptions of the Common Core State Standards?
      i. Where did you receive your initial teacher training?
         1. What was your major/concentration?
         2. Looking back, how well prepared were you to teach after graduation?
            a. Good aspects of your teacher preparation program
            b. Gaps in program or poor aspects of your teacher preparation program
         3. Have you gone to graduate school?
            a. If so where?
               i. What program / concentration?
            b. If not, have you considered graduate school?
               i. Where?
               ii. What program ?
      ii. What in-services have you attended in the last 3 years?
         1. What in services do you believe are the most beneficial to you?
            a. Why?
         2. What have you taken from in-services and implemented in your daily instruction?
         3. What type of in service do you enjoy the most?
      iii. What changes have you seen since you started teaching?

1. How have you adapted to them?
iv. What do you feel is the biggest change that you have seen in your career?
v. How have you learned about the CCSS?
vi. What steps have you taken to implement these standards into your curriculum for the 2014-2015 school year?

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Interview I Protocol Alignment to Research Questions
(December 2014/January 2015)

1. How does the mandated policy of the Common Core State Standards influence teachers as evidenced by their experiences
   a. How do teachers perceive the adoption of the Common Core State Standards influencing their professional practice?
      i. What have you done this year working with the CCSS?
         1. In the classroom
            a. Planning
            b. Testing
            c. Daily routine
         2. Outside the classroom
            a. Training
            b. Reading / personal research work

   b. How does a teacher's educational level and past experiences effect their perceptions of the Common Core State Standards?
      i. What do you feel the biggest change this year is?
         1. How have you seen / experienced that?
         2. How have you adjusted to that change?
            a. What it difficult?
            b. What strategies did you use to adapt?
            c. Do you think that it was for the better?
         3. How smooth do you think this year is going?
            a. How does it compare to previous years?

Is there anything else you would like to share?

Interview I Protocol Alignment to Research Questions
(April/May 2015)

1. How does the mandated policy of the Common Core State Standards influence teachers as evidenced by their experiences
   a. How do teachers perceive the adoption of the Common Core State Standards influencing their professional practice?
      i. (For Grades 3-5) What did you do different this year for test preparation?
         1. How much time did you spend on test preparation?
            a. How is that compared to previous years?
         2. How reflective of the students learning do you feel the tests were?
            a. How is that compared to previous years?
         3. What do you feel would be beneficial to change for next year?
         4. How do you plan on accomplishing that?

      ii. What do you feel was your biggest challenge to over come this year?
      iii. What was easier or more difficult than you thought it would be this year?
      iv. Looking back, what did you see your self doing differently this year ?
         1. Were they changes positive or negative?

   b. How does a teacher's educational level and past experiences effect their perceptions of the Common Core State Standards?
      i. How well do you feel your training prepared you for the changes this school year?
         1. Good
         2. Bad
         3. Missing?
      ii. What do you feel was most beneficial to you this year?
         1. Done before the year
         1. Done during the year

Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Interview IV Alignment (Not scheduled, will be included if needed based on previous three interviews and other data collection)

Interview I Protocol (August/September 2014)

Name of Interviewee:_____

Date:_____

Preliminary Script: "This is Jason Vicich. Today is _____. It is _____ o'clock, and I am here at _____ with _____ , who teaches _____. We will be discussing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and their perceptions and adaptations to them.

Question (Q) "How many years have you been teaching?"

(Q) "How many years here?

(Q) What different grades and / or subjects have you taught?

(Q) What academic subject area do you consider your greatest strength, not what you are best at teaching, what you feel you were the best at in college?

(Q) What academic area do you consider you're your weakest, again, not in regards to teaching, but what you feel you were best at in college?

(Q) When it comes to teaching, what subject area do you feel is your strength? Why?

(Q) Along the same lines, when it comes to teaching, what subject area do you feel you have the most room to grow? Why?

(Q) Where did you go to receive your initial teacher training?

(Q) What was your Major/Concentration (For elementary it will be Concentration, for secondary it will be major)

(Q) Looking back, how well prepared do you feel you were to teach after graduation?

(Q) What do you feel were the strong points of your teacher preparation program?

(Q) What areas do you feel that more preparation would have been helpful? In other words, is there something you felt unprepared for?

(Q) Have you attended Graduate School?

(If the answer is yes, ask the following three questions)
(Q) Where?

(Q) What program(s)?

(Q) Why did you choose that program and that school?

(If the Graduate school question is no, ask the following question)
(Q) Have you considered graduate school?

(IF the previous question is yes, ask the following three questions, if the answer is no skip them and go to the question on inservices)
(Q) What programs have you considered?

(Q) Where?

(Q) Why are you considering these?

Ok, now lets move onto the topic of inservices

(Q) What type of in-services do you feel are the most beneficial to you?

(Q) What makes you believe that ?

(Q) Can you think of a couple of examples of things that you have taken from in-services that you have implemented in you daily instruction?

(Q) What type of in-services do you enjoy the most?

(Q) What are some of the changes that you have experienced since you started teaching?

(Q) How have you adapted to these changes?

(Q) Which one of these changes do you feel is the most significant?

(Q) How have you learned about the CCSS?

(Q) How well prepared do you feel to implement the CCSS?

(Q) What steps have you taken to implement the CCSS into your curriculum?

(Q) What made you want to be a teacher ?

(Q) Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Interview II Protocol (December 2014/January 2015)
Name of Interviewee:_____

Date:_____

Preliminary Script: "This is Jason Vicich. Today is _____. It is
_____ o'clock, and I am here at _____ with _____, who
teaches _____. We will be discussing the Common Core State Standards
(CCSS) and their perceptions and adaptations to them.

(Q) What do you perceive as the biggest change or changes this year?

(Q) How have you personally seen or experienced this / these?

(Q) What have you personally done to adjust to this / these changes?

(Q) Do you feel this / these changes were difficult?

(Q) What particular strategies or approaches did you use to adapt to this change?

(Q) How does the first half of this year compare to previous years?

(Q) Do you feel in the big picture this/these changes were worth it?

(Q) Why or why not?

(Q) Are there any other changes that you have made this year that we didn't just mention above?

(Depending on the answer to the above question, and the "biggest change" question the
following questions may be answered if they were not brought up)

(Q) Anything different in planning?

(Q) Anything different in assessments?

(Q) Anything different in your daily routine / schedule?

(Q) I realize it is only January (or December), but overall how do you feel the CCSS implementation is going?

(Q) In your opinion, what could or should be done to make things work better for you ?

(Q) Is there anything else you would like to add?

Interview III Protocol (April/May 2015)(Toward the end of the year after the Spring assessment)

Name of Interviewee:_____

Date:_____

Preliminary Script: "This is Jason Vicich. Today is _____. It is _____ o'clock, and I am here at _____ with _____, who teaches _____. We will be discussing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and their perceptions and adaptations to them.

The testing questions are currently only for grades 3-5 as they are the only ones that give the ISAT. If the grade levels that the PARCC test is given to changes that, these questions will apply to those grade levels.
(Q) Now that the Spring Assessment (Change "spring assessment to ISAT or PARCC depending on what happens) lets take a little time to reflect on what it was all about. How well prepared do you feel your students were for the test?

(Q) How much time would you say that you spent on test preparation this year?

(Q) How does that compare to previous years?

(Q) (If there is a change ask "Why was there such a difference?)

(Q) Was there anything different in way of techniques or resources used, that you did this year?

(Q) Was the computer based, or paper based testing used?

(Q) Do you feel that the assessment given (ISAT OR PARCC) was reflective of the student's knowledge?

(Q) How accurate do you feel this test was compared to previous years?

(Q) How well prepared do you feel you were for the changes this school year?

(Q) What do you feel helped you the most this year?

(Q) What area, areas or information would you like to know more about for next year?

(Q) What do you feel what beneficial to you that you did before the school year started in the way of professional development or in-services?

(Q) How did it help you ?

(Q) What do you feel what beneficial to you that you did during the school year in the way of professional development or in-services ?

(Q) How did it help you ?

(Q) Now that the year is basically done (or "done" if the interview is held in June), What do you feel was your biggest challenge this year?

(Q) Why do you feel it was so challenging?

(Q) in total, do you feel this year was easier or more difficult than you anticipated?

(Q) What makes you say that ?

(Q) Looking back, what did you see yourself doing differently this year from previous years?

(Q) Do you feel these changes are a positive or a negative?

(Q) Is there anything else you would like to share?

I realize the school year is not quite over, and this is our last scheduled interview.

(Q) Do you feel that you have been able to fully express your perceptions as you reflect back on the year?

As you finish the year, if you have more perceptions and insight that you would like to share, please contact me and we will set up a time to sit down again and talk more.

Thank you very much for all of your help this year, it has been a pleasure working with you and everyone in the building.

Interview IV Protocol (June 2015 +)(Will be developed if it appears that it will be needed)

Name of Interviewee:_____

Date:_____

Preliminary Script: "This is Jason Vicich. Today is _____. It is _____ o'clock, and I am here at _____ with _____, who teaches _____. We will be discussing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and their perceptions and adaptations to them.

This will only be implemented if I am contacted in June 2015 by a participant that has more that they would like to share about their experiences and perceptions.

APPENDIX C

ILLINOIS LEARNING STANDARDS BEFORE COMMON CORE
STATE STANDARDS ADOPTION

STATE GOAL 5: Use the language arts to acquire, assess and communicate information.

Why This Goal Is Important: To be successful in school and in the world of work, students must be able to use a wide variety of information resources (written, visual and electronic). They must also know how to frame questions for inquiry, identify and organize relevant information and communicate it effectively in a variety of formats. These skills are critical in school across all learning areas and are key to successful career and lifelong learning experiences.

A. Locate, organize, and use information from various sources to answer questions, solve problems and communicate ideas.

EARLY ELEMENTARY	LATE ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL	EARLY HIGH SCHOOL	LATE HIGH SCHOOL
5.A.1a Identify questions and gather information.	5.A.2a Formulate questions and construct a basic research plan.	5.A.3a Identify appropriate resources to solve problems or answer questions through research.	5.A.4a Demonstrate a knowledge of strategies needed to prepare a credible research report (e.g., notes, planning sheets).	5.A.5a Develop a research plan using multiple forms of data.
5.A.1b Locate information using a variety of resources.	5.A.2b Organize and integrate information from a variety of sources (e.g., books, interviews, library reference materials, web-sites, CD/ROMs).	5.A.3b Design a project related to contemporary issues (e.g., real-world math, career development, community service) using multiple sources.	5.A.4b Design and present a project (e.g., research report, scientific study, career/higher education opportunities) using various formats from multiple sources.	5.A.5b Research, design and present a project to an academic, business or school community audience on a topic selected from among contemporary issues.

B. Analyze and evaluate information acquired from various sources.

EARLY ELEMENTARY	LATE ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL	EARLY HIGH SCHOOL	LATE HIGH SCHOOL
5.B.1a Select and organize information from various sources for a specific purpose.	5.B.2a Determine the accuracy, currency and reliability of materials from various sources.	5.B.3a Choose and analyze information sources for individual, academic and functional purposes.	5.B.4a Choose and evaluate primary and secondary sources (print and nonprint) for a variety of purposes.	5.B.5a Evaluate the usefulness of information, synthesize information to support a thesis, and present information in a logical manner in oral and written forms.
5.B.1b Cite sources used.	5.B.2b Cite sources used.	5.B.3b Identify, evaluate and cite primary sources.	5.B.4b Use multiple sources and multiple formats; cite according to standard style manuals.	5.B.5b Credit primary and secondary sources in a form appropriate for presentation or publication for a particular audience.

C. Apply acquired information, concepts and ideas to communicate in a variety of formats.

EARLY ELEMENTARY	LATE ELEMENTARY	MIDDLE/JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL	EARLY HIGH SCHOOL	LATE HIGH SCHOOL

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5.C.1a Write letters, reports and stories based on acquired information.	5.C.2a Create a variety of print and nonprint documents to communicate acquired information for specific audiences and purposes.	5.C.3a Plan, compose, edit and revise documents that synthesize new meaning gleaned from multiple sources.	5.C.4a Plan, compose, edit and revise information (e.g., brochures, formal reports, proposals, research summaries, analyses, editorials, articles, overheads, multimedia displays) for presentation to an audience.	5.C.5a Using contemporary technology, create a research presentation or prepare a documentary related to academic, technical or occupational topics and present the findings in oral or multimedia formats.
5.C.1b Use print, nonprint, human and technological resources to acquire and use information.	5.C.2b Prepare and deliver oral presentations based on inquiry or research.	5.C.3b Prepare and orally present original work (e.g., poems, monologues, reports, plays, stories) supported by research.	5.C.4b Produce oral presentations and written documents using supportive research and incorporating contemporary technology.	5.C.5b Support and defend a thesis statement using various references including media and electronic resources.
		5.C.3c Take notes, conduct interviews, organize and report information in oral, visual and electronic formats.	5.C.4c Prepare for and participate in formal debates.	

APPENDIX D

Qualitative Codes used

Code	Times Assigned
Standards	272
Curriculum	267
Reading	213
2014-2015 changes	174
Changes	160
Students	158
Math	154
Testing	138
Planning	136
Student Achievement	120
Assessment	99
MAP	89
PARCC	87
CCSS Alignment	65
Positive Outlook	64
Undergraduate Teacher Training	63
2015-2016 school year	59
Grades	59
Positive Reaction to changes	53
In-Services	52
Mastery	50
CCSS Learning	48
CCSS Assessment	47
PARCC Frustration	46
CCSS Problems	45
Collaboration	44
Learning Gaps	43
Achievement Gap	43
Frustration	43
In-Service Type (helpful)	37
Administrators	37
PARCC Reaction (Kids)	37
Preparedness	36
Writing	35
Student Age	35
Grad School	35
Schedule	32
Individual Decision Making (Curriculum choices)	31
Experience	30
Age and developmentally appropriate	29
student groups	28
Testing Results	26
Useful In-services	26
Expectations	25
MAP Issues	25

MAP Preparation	25
Student Reaction MAP	25
Student Frustration	24
Struggles	23
Certification	22
Difficulties	22
Student Development	21
Isolation	21
Daily 5	21
Hands on learning	20
Academic Weakness	20
Skills Based Report Card	20
Clinical Experience	20
PARCC vs ISAT	19
Apprehension	19
PARCC Problems	19
Grade Retention	19
Academic Strength	18
Lack of time	18
IEP Students	18
Adaptations	17
RTI	17
PARCC Preparation	17
Class Size	16
Grad School Program of Study	16
Independent	16
Location	15
Teaching weakness	15
Skills	14
State Regulations	13
ISAT	13
Standards Based Report Cards	13
2013-2014 Changes	13
Demographics	13
Parents	13
Vocabulary	12
In-Service Ideas	12
Student Growth	12
Teaching Philosophy	12
Weak points of teacher training	12
Undergraduate Major	11
Bachelors Degree	11
Technology	11
Student Behavior	11
Opinion / Idea Change	10
Changes (most significant)	10
Confidence	10
Why are you a teacher	9
Student Teaching	9
Maternity Leave	9
Math	9

Special Education	8
Grad School Rationale	8
Preference	8
Letter Grades	8
Strong Points of Teacher Ed	8
Teaching Strength	8
Grad School (No)	7
Challenging Students	7
Professional Issues	7
Flexibility	7
Depth	7
Grad School Timing	7
Grad School (Yes)	7
Pacing	7
PARCC Practice	6
Concentration	5
Grad School Location	5
Homework	5
Previous innovations	5
MAP	5
College Readiness	4
Evaluations	4
Problem solving	4
Title I	4
Pearson	4
MA Degree	4
Student Weakness	4
Perceptions	4
Not Difficult	3
District type	3
Reflecting	3
Aide	3
Record Keeping	3
Resources	3
SOCQ	3
Future Plans	3
Methods	2
Career Goals	2
Data	2
Benchmarks	1
Judging Teachers	1
RTI	1
PARCC opt out	1
Motivation	1
Independent thinking	1
Passion	1
Proactive	1

APPENDIX E

CODING PROCESS

The coding process was continuous throughout the study. The following steps were used to ensure that the coding was standard throughout the process.

1. The entire initial interview series was completed and transcribed.

2. All eight interviews were coded using open coding.

3. After all interviews of the initial series were coded, the code list was analyzed to determine if any codes were duplicate in meaning, and if so they were combined under a unified code.

4. The entire second interview series was completed and transcribed.

5. All eight interviews of the second interview series were coded using open coding.

6. After all interviews of the second series were coded, the code list was analyzed to determine if any codes were duplicate in meaning, and if so they were combined under a unified code.

7. Upon the completion of the analysis of the second round of coding, the first and second series code lists were compared to see if any codes were duplicated in meaning. If so, they were combined under a unified code.

8. The entire third interview series was completed and transcribed.

9. All eight interviews of the third interview series were coded using open coding.

10. Upon the completion of the analysis of the third round of coding, the first, second and third series code lists were compared to see if any codes were duplicated in meaning. If so, they were combined under a unified code.

11. The final unified code list was used in Atlas.ti for data analysis. The final list of codes, and the number of times that they were used in coding process is included as Appendix D.

APPENDIX F

UNIVERSITY OF
ARKANSAS

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board

July 3, 2014

MEMORANDUM

| TO: | Jason Vicich |
| | Ed Bengtson |

FROM: Ro Windwalker
            IRB Coordinator

RE: New Protocol Approval

IRB Protocol #:   14-06-782

Protocol Title: *Examining Teachers' Perceptions and Adaptations Related to the*
                       First-Year of Implementation of the Common Core State
                       Standards in a Rural Elementary School in Central Illinois

Review Type: ☐ EXEMPT   ☒ EXPEDITED   ☐ FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 06/30/2014 Expiration Date: 06/29/2015

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (http://vpred.uark.edu/210.php). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval. Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 10 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes.   All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

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