



American
Reading Forum

Yearbook

2014

Bergh, B., Edge, C., Cameron-Standerford, A., Imdieke, S., Standerford, N.S., and Reissner, L. (2014). (Re)seeing our teacher education practices through visual literacy. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online]. Vol. 34.

(Re)Seeing Our Teacher Education Practices through Visual Literacy

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Abstract

Guided by feminist communication theory and the transactional theory of learning, eight teacher educators used self-study methodology to critically “read” their teaching in light of the Common Core State Standards for visual literacy. Results demonstrated (1) visuals served as both objects and mediums; (2) teacher educators were part of the interpretive act of making meaning through visual texts; (3) in order to implement educational mandates, teacher educators needed time and space; and (4) the use of a collaborative conference protocol facilitated the teacher educators’ ability to step back and re-see policy as a medium for transformation. Together they learned that while policy initiatives are likely not going away, educators can learn to change their response to mandates by becoming part of the interpretative act of implementing educational policy.

(Re)Seeing Our Teacher Education Practices through Visual Literacy

As a group of eight educators representing many facets of teacher education, we conducted a self-study of our teacher education practices with the guiding question of: “How do we use visual literacy to re-see our worlds and to help others to construct meaning in theirs?” We began by looking back at educational policy patterns within the United States and the state of Michigan as a broader context for our work as educators. We then examined our individual practice in order to critically “read” our teaching in light of the Common Core State Standards for visual literacy. Together we sought to understand how we use and learn through visual literacy in order to better help others—students, prospective teachers, practicing teachers, administrators, parents, policy makers and the general public—to understand how visuals communicate and construct meaning (Debes, 1970; Eisner, 1998; Langer, 2011). Through collaborative self-study, we learned that visuals can be both the product of past meaning-making events and the starting point for present and future meaning-making. The purpose of this paper is to present the research process we used, to share what we came to understand as we studied our teaching practices, and to discuss broader implications for the future of the profession. While policy initiatives and mandates are likely not going away, we can re-see our response to that policy.

Context

As we began our study of the Common Core State Standards, we recognized the need to understand the broader context of this particular reform movement. We wanted to place ourselves in a similar position that public school teachers face when navigating new standards. We understand that we can’t teach the new standards within this policy until we make sense of them for ourselves. To know the policy, we have to first experience it as learners; it is from this vantage point that we can better prepare our own education students to learn and teach the standards. The reason we went to policy is that we recognize that this is not the first time that policy has impacted what happens in the classroom. In our institution, we are fortunate to be part of a larger self-study group comprised of eight teacher educators representing various disciplines who each have one to four decades of teaching experience. Early in our conversations we wondered, would Common Core State Standards be just another swing of the policy pendulum?

Policy

Since the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, state and federal policies have driven educational reform (Ravitch, 2013; Standerford, 1997). To complicate matters, individuals and corporations with the deepest financial resources have the most influence on the direction of policy. As school reform continues to be influenced by those outside of the profession—major corporations, Wall Street hedge fund managers, and entrepreneurs—the role of the teacher to provide perspective and input into the reform measures diminishes (Ravitch, 2013). Teachers are expected to embrace changes to the curriculum and the pedagogy through which the curriculum

is taught without the opportunity to internalize and make meaningful the changes for themselves first (Cohen & Hill, 2001).

Most recently, the state education chiefs and governors in 48 states worked together to develop the Common Core State Standards. Through their work, they established a set of college-and career-ready standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in the content areas of English language arts/literacy and mathematics. The overarching goal for the implementation of these standards was to ensure that high school graduates are prepared for college or career entry (National Governors, 2010). However, the published standards do not address the crucial role of the teacher in the process of implementation. As teachers attempt yet another change in their instruction with few opportunities to experience and construct clear understandings of what those changes mean for learners and require from teachers, the outcomes could be dismal.

Visual Literacy

Just as K-12 teachers are being asked to reform their practice in light of the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), it is assumed that teacher educators are poised to be able to prepare teacher candidates and practicing teachers to implement these new standards. Our desire to explore this assumption coupled with our inspiration from one member's recent (2013) work as the chair of the Caldecott committee that recognizes excellence in illustrations, became the impetus for our research group to explore our current use of visual literacy in our university classrooms. The Common Core English Language Arts State Standards, for both narrative and informational texts, reference components of multimodality in standard seven across all grade levels. Multimodality refers to the multiple modes through which we communicate. Modes are made up of socially and culturally agreed ways through which we create meaning linguistically, visually, artistically, auditorially, and spatially, each with its own grammars (Martens, Martens, Doyle, Loomis, & Aghalarov, 2013). Relative to the CCSS, standards emphasize illustrations in stories in the early grades, but in later grades, the images from a variety of sources such as digital texts, multimedia elements, or live performances become embedded in the standards reflecting the multiple modes through which meaning can be communicated.

The introduction of the term "visual literacy" is credited to John Debes (1970), who defined it as the ability to discriminate and interpret the visible actions, objects, and symbols in a person's environment. Although verbal and visual texts are both used to communicate a message, the way in which they do so differs. Nodelman (1998) observed that verbal texts are arranged and read in a linear, forward motion, and that any movement forward in time and space must be expressed through words, while visual texts are viewed at a single moment in time across a spatial plane. The way in which visuals convey meaning (Langer, 1942) is essential in the study of visual literacy. If, as Sipe contended, reading visual images is not a skill that is learned

automatically (2008), the role of teachers in developing visual literacy in learners becomes even more critical.

Teacher Education

In our study, we examined a standard meant to guide K-12 student learning. However, because we were working with adult learners, we consciously situated our thinking in adult learning theory. As teacher educators of undergraduate and graduate students, the researchers were mindful to model the pedagogy related to visual literacy instruction while respecting the learning differences between a K-12 learner and a postsecondary adult. Andragogy, generally defined as the scholarly approach to the learning of adults, was originally coined by Alexander Kapp in 1833 and later developed into a theory of adult education by Malcolm Knowles (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). Andragogy, as outlined by Knowles, et al., includes five guiding principles: 1) self-concept – an adult learner views him/herself as a self-directed human; 2) adult learner experience – an adult learner accumulates experiences which becomes a resource for future learning; 3) readiness to learn – an adult learner’s readiness to learn is oriented toward the development of skills related to social roles; 4) orientation to learning – an adult learner seeks knowledge for immediate application to a problem-centered issue; 5) motivation to learn – an adult learner is intrinsically motivated. Drawing on adult learning theory, we assumed our university students were ready and motivated to understand themselves and their future or current teaching practices through the courses we were teaching.

Theoretical Frameworks

Building from our prior self-study research, we situated our study in transactional reading and learning theory (e.g., Dewey, 1938; Dewey & Bentley, 1949; Rosenblatt, 1978/1994; Rosenblatt, 2005) complemented by feminist communication theory (e.g., Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Belenky, Bond, & Weinstock, 1997; Colflesh, 1996). Epistemologically, transactional and feminist communication theories recognize the relationship between a knower and his or her environment, both in what they know and how they communicate that knowledge.

Most commonly associated with Louise Rosenblatt’s theory of reading and writing, the transactional theory of reading asserts that meaning is not located in the text for the reader to withdraw; rather, it is made through the active coming together of a reader and a text in a context. Meaning—whether as a poem or a scientific report—“happens during the interplay between signs and a particular reader and a particular time and place” (Rosenblatt, 2005, p. x). Humans share an ecological relationship with their environment—both taking from it and contributing to it (Dewey & Bentley, 1949; Rosenblatt, 2005), much like Gee’s (1990, 1996, 2008) notion of society as an ambiguous cultural text that is read and composed by its members. The knower, the known and knowing are aspects of one process (Dewey & Bentley, 1949).

Transactional theories of reading (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994; Rosenblatt, 2005) and knowing (Dewey & Bentley, 1949) also suggest that learning occurs when people consider, discuss, and inquire into problems and issues of significance to them. From a feminist perspective, care and understanding are at the center of teaching and learning (e.g., Noddings, 1984); they are essential components of knowers' seeing knowledge as actively constructed by all human beings (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986).

Framed by transactional and feminist perspectives, the crux of professional learning for educators is to first actively make meaning and then to use and communicate constructed knowledge in ways that can empower others to construct meaningful understanding through educational experiences. Teachers work in an environment influenced by policy-driven reform; in order for teachers to use their knowledge to improve their teaching practice and to create educative experiences for others, they must first construct an understanding of the new standards as learners and meaning makers. This process of making meaning, as opposed to getting meaning, from teaching standards is dependent on teachers' opportunity to transact with the policy texts, and is aided by communication with and support from a caring community of learners.

Methods

We chose to situate our inquiry in self-study methodology. Each year this group engages in a year-long self-study, inviting new colleagues to join the research family. In 2011, we—Christi, Abby and Bethney—were new faculty members who were invited to join the self-study group as we transitioned from our work as K-12 educators and into the academy as new assistant professors. By the end of our first self-study, we too had come to view the conference room where we met as our public homeplace; seated at a table, we were colleagues who acted as critical friends and gradually became a collegiate family.

Rooted in post-modernist and feminist thinking (LaBoskey, 2004), self-study methodology both informs the researchers and generates knowledge that can be shared within and beyond the professional discourse community. Self-study research does not prove answers, but instead helps the researchers to explore and challenge their assumptions with the purpose of improving their understanding and practice of teaching (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001).

Drawing from our previous self-study research (Cameron-Standerford, Bergh, Edge, Standerford, Reissner, Sabin, & Standerford, 2013) in which we “textualized” (Edge, 2011, p. 330) our teacher education practices, we decided to examine our individual practice in order to critically read our work in light of the Common Core State Standards for visual literacy. In order to examine our ongoing work with visuals, our group of eight met over the course of one year—every two weeks during

academic semesters and once monthly during the summer. To guide our study, we collectively asked: “How do we use visuals as texts to re-see our worlds and to help others to construct meaning in theirs?” Early in our study, we each identified a way in which we had or could use visual texts (e.g. illustrations, symbols, photographs) in our teaching practice. From this initial point, we examined artifacts from our teacher education practices in order to understand how the visuals facilitated the construction or communication of meaning. Data included visual and written artifacts—such as teaching materials and work our students produced during critical events (Webster & Mertova, 2007) from our teaching practices—documented observations, reading responses from professional literature, and field notes from our self-study meetings composed by multiple members.

Articulated in the theoretical frames of feminist communication theory and transactional theory of learning, data analysis was multifaceted and guided by our agreed upon epistemological stance. We viewed ourselves as active meaning makers who could learn from our teacher education practices by textualizing (Edge, 2011) them, critically reading them, and discussing them with “critical friends” (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 819) in the safe space of a public homeplace (Cameron-Standerford, et al., 2013).

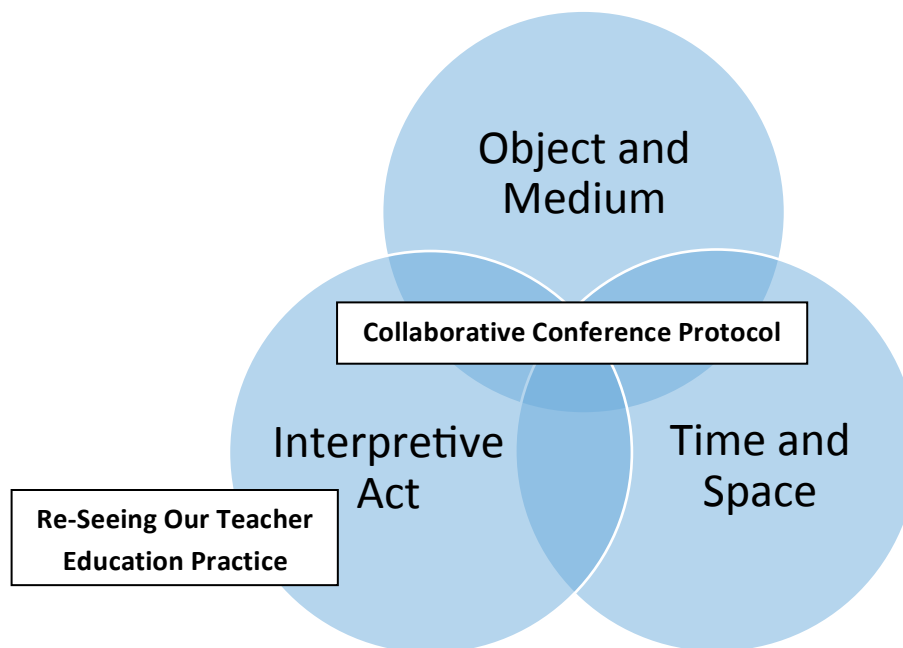
Independently, we each engaged in meaning analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) and wrote to construct an initial understanding (Richardson, 2000) of what we thought was happening through the use of visuals in our practice. Next, we each orally shared the teaching event with our critical friends and presented visual and written artifacts related to the teaching event.

A modified collaborative conference protocol (Anderson, et al., 2010; Cameron-Standerford, et al., 2013; Seidel, et al., 1997) guided us to see and re-see our teaching event from multiple perspectives and form a new understanding of practice (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). This protocol included: listening to each individual’s initial analysis of the teaching event and subsequent learning; taking turns saying what we heard or noticed while the individual who had shared quietly took notes; taking turns offering speculative comments, connections, and wonderings; inviting the individual back into the conversation to respond to comments or questions offered by the group or to offer additional details or insights sparked by listening to the group; and writing take-away reflections. Individual take-away statements became a way to attend to the themes developing from our collective work. Examining teaching events and related artifacts through multiple data sources and perspectives, we “crystalized” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963) our data by considering each emerging theme.

Results

We sought to see and re-see our teacher education practice through our study of visuals. Across our eight self-studies, we saw four common facets: (1) visuals acted

both as objects and as mediums in our teaching; (2) we are a part of, rather than outside, the interpretive act of making meaning through visual texts; and (3) educators need space and time in order to be reflect on their teaching practice and meaningfully understand educational policy. Seeing these three facets in each of our individual self-studies bolstered our ability to re-see our practice and to develop broadened and deeper understandings of our teaching and student learning. Stepping back from our research, we later realized that (4) what facilitated our recognition of these three themes was our use of a collaborative conference protocol to discuss our data from multiple vantage points.



Object and Medium

We realized we were using visuals as both objects and mediums. A visual object is a representation of the understanding or interpretation of the person who created it. The visual, once created, becomes static in meaning and no longer represents a transactional experience for the creator. A visual interpreted as an object can be further described as a noun naming or identifying an individual experience. Consider the interpretative act of naming clouds as representations of other known objects— e.g. one person names a dragon, another a dog. This process of identification of the object is personal and does not require the consideration of others' perspectives.

Beyond naming a visual as an object, we recognized that visuals also could be mediums or tools through which learning is constructed simultaneously between two or more individuals. Interpreting a visual as a medium requires the process to be

defined dynamically denoting the active role of both the teacher and the student in creating a shared understanding.

The visuals we selected for use in our classrooms were images that represented past meanings that we had made and wanted to share with our students. In sharing these images, we assumed our students would arrive at the same meaning we had made. We assumed that the visual was a medium. Through the use of a collaborative conference protocol, we were able to critically look at the assumption that our meaning would automatically become our students' meaning. As a result, we were later able to acknowledge that we were not providing students with time and space to make their own meaning. To them, the visual was an object. However, through connecting ideas and engaging in literate thinking (Langer, 1987) meaning can be created rather than superficially assigned and subsequently, transfers the perception of a visual as an object to a visual as a medium through which meaning making occurs. In order to do this, we—students and teachers—needed time and space in order to engage in our own interpretative act.

Interpretative Act

We came to realize we are a part of the interpretative act of viewing visual texts. That is, the image we either interpreted as an object or utilized as a medium for communicating our understanding involved a transaction with the visual text. In the transactional act, or meaning-making event, we the viewers, the image viewed, and viewing were aspects of one process.

As a transactional event, viewing and creating images necessitated transmediation—reorganizing meaning we made from one sign system to another (Harste, 2000). We either began with a visual that we interpreted as a text, using words, or we began within a linguistic sign system in the form of words we wrote, spoke, or thought and reorganized meaning into a visual text. For example, Bethney began with an image to prompt conversation in an online discussion forum whereas, Abby and Christi asked students to generate images to represent their perception or lived experiences. Sandy and Margi began with illustrations in children's books and asked students to use words to articulate ideas that the pictures represented. In either direction, the meaning-making event required us to actively make sense by taking what we understood in one sign system and translating that knowledge into another sign system. This act of transmediation was an interpretive and creative act. We read visual or verbal texts and created new visual or verbal texts through the meanings we made (Smagorinsky, 2008).

In retrospect, we felt that recognizing ourselves as part of the interpretative act of viewing visuals should have been more obvious at the outset of our study. Theoretically and practically, we claimed to view knowledge as constructed through transactions with texts. Nevertheless, our initial limited understanding of the specific language and compositional elements of visual texts prohibited our ability to

recognize that we were engaged in an interpretive act akin to what we knew we experienced as readers of a written text. Once we began to explore, to understand, and to construct a language for interpreting elements of visual texts—for example, perspective, color, lines, and shape (Connors, 2011; O’Neil, 2011)—with which we could speak to what we did to make sense of images and how we constructed interpretations of the visuals, we were able to recognize that we were a part of the interpretive act of reading and making sense of visual texts.

With this new focus, we were able to textualize (Edge, 2011) our interpretation—to step back from the meaning we made, examine how it was constructed, and consider how our knowledge, experiences, assumptions, and values as educators guided our interpretations. From this vantage point, we were able to see and re-see the teaching events we were studying as a kind of text we constructed—a text itself open to interpretation, connections, and questions (Cameron-Standerford, et al., 2013). This is significant in that the textualized vantage point allowed us to see and to understand how and why we selected particular images to use in our teaching and to understand how or why we responded to student-produced images the way that we did. The metacognitive layer to our thinking aided our sense of agency and created space for us to become a part of the standards and the visuals we were studying. Within our individual self-studies, the images students produced were created in formative assessment tasks. Therefore, our textualized vantage point both created space for us to see and to candidly articulate the extent of our understanding of the student-produced image to our fellow researchers and to be conscious of communicating with care, respect, and encouragement toward our students and their in-process thinking.

Time and Space

In order to engage in the interpretive act, we needed time and space. By time and space, we mean room—a social and cognitive place—to allow us to engage in meaning making over time. Without the needed time and space, we resorted to assigning meaning to visual objects and responsive texts based on assumptions. As teacher researchers, we recognize that we need time and space to engage in research, however, when it comes to our classroom practices we focus on preparation and teaching rather than on reflection. We are bound by limited amounts of time and space, which removes the opportunity for engagement in an authentic, interpretive act between ourselves and the visual text. When our teaching and research were connected through self-study, our teaching events became texts and we allotted ourselves the necessary time and space from which we could study our practice.

Through ongoing data analysis in our collaborative conference protocol, we discovered how to use the language and composition of visual texts to create a space that allowed opportunity to step back from our initial responses and assumptions. In this space, we were able to plunge beneath the surface of our initial thinking in order to observe patterns, make connections, ask questions, consider other’s perspectives

and experiences, and essentially (re)see our teaching practice through a more objective and broadened perspective. Visuals are both the product of past meaning-making events and the starting point for present and future meaning making. We needed meaningful time and space to be able to inquire into, transact through, and make new meanings from the inquiry puzzles we brought to our collaborative self-study space.

Educational Significance

One of the most significant outcomes of our collective self-study was the realization that we would not have come to deeply understand and to re-see our practice had we not participated in collaborative self-study with critical friends. Individually, we would have likely ignored the issues that led to meaningful understanding, but through collaborative self-study, we reframed our teacher education practices in ways that led to re-envisioning our practice and ourselves in relationship to that practice.

In addition to re-seeing our practice, we were able to re-see policy by drawing insights parallel to those from our study of visuals. In other words, we came to recognize our individual studies mirrored our study of policy patterns. From this point of understanding, we were able to take ownership and accept responsibility for teaching the Common Core State Standards because we no longer viewed them as an object we had to demonstrate compliance toward. We came to envision policy as a medium. Prior to this study, we viewed the standards as a thing we documented or talked about without ever becoming a medium within of our own teaching.

At the end of this study we were able to re-see our prior understanding of policy as divorced from our educational beliefs. Much like the teacher educator who lectures about active learning rather than uses active learning to educate perspective teachers, we talked about the need to teach the Common Core without ever actually first understanding it as learners.

We now recognize that for teachers to first understand as learners they need time and space—for example, through the use of self-study—to move the Common Core State Standards beyond an object placed upon them, to a space in which to continue to create meaningful learning opportunities. Until that time, we advocate for teachers to create opportunities to interpret ongoing policy reform efforts, such as the Common Core State Standards, as a medium through which their own learning and the learning of their students can begin. We are advocating for educators at all levels to become a part of the critical conversation by choosing to see the standards as a medium through which they make educative experiences rather than as an object imposed upon their classrooms.

Well-captured in a sentiment expressed by some educators: I can just wait for the pendulum to swing and the new policies will simply disappear and something

else will come along. However, we are no longer content to wait for the pendulum to swing. Like visuals, standards can be interpreted as both objects and mediums. Recognizing the need for teachers to engage in the meaning making process—that is, the opportunity to create meaning which allows the knower, knowing, and known to become one process—can result in policy becoming a window through which we can re-see opportunities for schools.

Now, we see true educational reform as not a *thing* to be mandated. Rather, educational reform is a process of transformation in which teachers become empowered through a sense of agency to work in collaboration with their students and colleagues to create meaningful, educative experiences. As long as policy mandates for standards-based education are imposed upon classrooms from outside with little input from teachers, policies have little chance to succeed at the classroom level (Cohen, 2011; Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988). Policy does not educate nor do mandates as objects create space for educators to first understand them as learners. What teachers know and do is one of the most important influences on student learning (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996).

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Ciminelli, M. R. (2014). Preservice teachers ponder the power of poetry. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online]. Vol. 34.

Preservice Teachers Ponder the Power of Poetry

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Abstract

Research confirms benefits of using poetry in the classroom (i.e. Kane & Rule, 2004; Sekeres & Gregg, 2007). However, preservice teachers often lack confidence with poetry (Wade & Sidaway, 1990) and are therefore reluctant to teach it (Hughes & Dymoke, 2011). This mixed methods study examined the effects of a poetry intervention with thirty-three undergraduate preservice teachers. Participants were introduced to various types of poetry and asked to summarize their learning about course content through writing an original poem following the newly presented format. Based on theories of constructivism, the activities were designed to be authentic and active. An analysis of pre- and post-surveys and anecdotal notes revealed an increase in participants' knowledge, confidence, and appreciation of poetry. Implications about active learning and innovative teaching techniques for teacher educators are discussed.

Preservice Teachers Ponder the Power of Poetry

Teachers of preservice teachers have an interesting challenge. On the one hand, instructors must teach their students about content, whether it is foundations of education, research and assessment, literacy instruction, or child and adolescent development. Concurrently, they must teach pedagogy. While doing both, instructors should ultimately model exemplary practices in the classroom. This study was designed to introduce students to an innovative and engaging technique of using poetry as an instructional tool while simultaneously teaching the content of a language arts methods course.

There are many documented benefits of using poetry in the classroom. Research confirms that poetry has been effective in promoting content concepts (Kane & Rule, 2004; Maxim, 1998; Robertson, 1997). Poetry can be used to differentiate instruction (Szabo, 2008), create understanding (Eisner, 1985), and increase personal connections with text (Sekeres & Gregg, 2007). The reason for these benefits is the close ties between writing and thinking because writing “allows students to share their thoughts with others and themselves” (Marcum-Dietrich, Byrne, and O’Hern, 2009p. 14). This is supported by the theories of Vygotsky (1962, 1978) that language is a tool that advances thinking and learning.

In addition to the above benefits, poetry can be a powerful tool for connecting with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) in a meaningful and engaging way (Vardell, 2013). This increases the value of its use since the CCSS are omnipresent across many states today. The CCSS support an interdisciplinary approach to literacy (CCSS, 2010, p.4). Strickland (2012) noted, “The language arts – listening, speaking, reading, and writing – should be integrated with each other and across the curriculum” (p.25). Many standards related to comprehension, fluency, and phonics can be addressed through poetry (Dalton, 2012). Furthermore, poetry has been shown to successfully help students, particularly struggling readers, learn these foundational reading skills (Rasinski & Zimmerman, 2013).

In spite of the positive effects of using poetry in the classroom, preservice teachers often lack confidence about their poetry knowledge (Wade & Sidaway, 1990) which results in reluctance to teach it (Hughes & Dymoke, 2011; Ray, 1999). Not surprisingly, the extent to which preservice teachers utilize various teaching strategies depends largely on their prior knowledge and beliefs (Grossman, Smagorinsky, & Valencia, 1999). In essence, preservice teachers cannot teach that which they do not know (Leko & Brownell, 2011). Due to lack of confidence and/or knowledge, it can be surmised that few preservice teachers may use poetry as a pedagogical tool in their future classrooms.

The intent of this project was to elevate preservice teachers’ knowledge about poetry and its positive effects on learners. The specific goals of this venture were fourfold: 1) to actively engage preservice teachers in learning about poetry; 2) to increase

preservice teachers' awareness of poetry as a tool for teaching; 3) to increase preservice teachers' confidence in a topic they may use as a tool to teach their future students; and 4) to increase language arts content knowledge through the use of poetry.

Theoretical Perspectives

The theory of constructivism guided the design of this project. Grounded in the works of Vygotsky and Piaget, constructivist theories have influenced educational thinking for several decades (Asvoll, 2012). Essentially, constructivist theories propose that individuals learn by connecting new information with their existing knowledge. "The learner brings to the learning environment knowledge from past experience, and that knowledge has a strong influence upon how the learner constructs meaning and acquires new knowledge from new experiences," (Allen, 2008, p. 30-31). A constructivist environment is one that is student-centered and includes authentic learning opportunities. Additionally, advocates of constructivist approaches believe that the process of knowledge acquisition must be active rather than passive and applicable to the learner's everyday world to become stored in long-term memory (Allen, 2008). Based on these principles, the activities of this study were designed to be authentic and active. They are authentic in that participants are using poetry as a tool for expressing their learning of a language arts topic presented during class time. The activities are active because students will be participating in reading, writing, and sharing various poems.

Method

This study was conducted in an undergraduate Birth-Grade Six Language Arts education methods course at a small liberal arts university. This was the second of two literacy courses for the students in the education program, occurring near the middle of their coursework. The study was funded through an internal College Committee on Teaching and Learning grant, and as such, active learning was integral to the design of this project. The study was conducted during the first nine weeks of the semester. The classes met twice per week for eighty minutes each session. The activities for this study took place during the first and last ten minutes of the first class period of each week.

Participants

Participants were thirty-three undergraduate preservice teachers in two different course sections, with fifteen and eighteen students each. All participants were female. Thirty-one were birth through grade six majors and two were Teaching English to Students of Other Languages majors. The majority of students were juniors in college, with the remainder in their sophomore year. Three participants were African American; thirty were Caucasian.

Research Design

During the first week of the semester, participants anonymously completed and submitted a survey modified from Stickling, Prasun, and Olsen (2011) about their feelings and thoughts about poetry (see Appendix). For the next seven weeks, participants worked with a different form of poetry each week. During the ninth week, students again

anonymously completed the same survey taken at the beginning of the study. Anonymity was employed on the surveys with the intent to encourage students to answer honestly without fear of their answers affecting their course grade.

During each of the seven weeks of the study, students were introduced to a different form of poetry in the first ten minutes of class. Over the course of the study, the following types of poetry were used: rhyming (abab and abba format), acrostic, haiku, cinquain, diamante, bio poem, and ABC poem. The instructor began each session by providing explicit instruction about the form of poetry. For example, for a haiku poem, students were told that it is a poem with three lines, with a pattern of 5, 7, and 5 syllables per line, and it is typically about nature. Next, students read several examples of poems following the format of the day. These examples were either provided by the instructor in the form of books or online resources, or students were asked ahead of time to bring in examples. The reading of these poems took a variety of forms during the semester, including whole group readings, small groupings, paired reading, and individual reading.

Following the introductory poetry lesson, the regular course content was taught for the remainder of the class. As part of this language arts course, the content included topics such as emerging literacy, talking, comprehension, literacy strategies, writer's workshop, and vocabulary. The final ten minutes of class were devoted to having students synthesize their learning of the content by creating an original poem following the style introduced at the beginning of the session. The poems were written in a variety of ways each week, including whole group, small group, pairs, and individually. For the whole group writing, which occurred twice, one student would stand at the white board and elicit suggestions for lines or words for the poem. She would lead the conversation and negotiate the choosing of the text as she wrote the poem on the board. Following three of the lessons, students worked in small groups or pairs to create a poem. Two weeks students wrote poems individually. Poems were shared out loud at the conclusion of each class period. This sharing took the form of choral group readings in the instances where poems were jointly created. For the individual writing, volunteers were asked to share their poems. Each week all poems were collected for analysis. Participants were informed that the poems were not graded and did not count towards the course grade.

Data Sources and Analysis

Data sources were both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Quantitatively, the pre-survey was anonymously completed and collected the first week of class, and the same procedure was used for the post-survey during the ninth week. Using an online statistical analysis instrument, descriptive statistics were calculated for the first five items on the survey. Due to the anonymity of the surveys, an unpaired *t*-test was used to determine if the differences were significant. The means and standard deviations of these items and the results of the unpaired *t*-test are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of Descriptive Statistics and Unpaired t-test of Items on the Poetry Survey

Item	Pre <i>M</i>	Pre SD	Post <i>M</i>	Post SD	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
1. How do you personally feel about poetry?	3.13	0.87	3.76	0.79	3.07	0.003*
2. How often do you feel poetry should be used in the classroom?	3.69	0.64	3.94	0.78	1.42	0.161
3. How comfortable would you feel using poetry in the classroom?	3.44	0.91	3.88	0.93	1.93	0.058
4. How interested would you be in receiving ideas for using poetry in the classroom?	4.38	0.66	4.42	0.87	0.28	0.798
5. Do you feel poetry instruction is beneficial to students?	3.94	0.72	4.08	0.79	0.74	0.463

* $p < .01$ (2-tailed test)

Qualitative data included the original poems, anecdotal notes from observations during the lessons, and two open-ended questions from the survey. The original poems were collected and evaluated for accuracy of the poetic format introduced during the lesson as well as for evidence of knowledge of the language arts content presented in class. Additional data were gleaned from observations and conversations throughout the semester. In particular, students' comments about poetry were attended to and these were recorded as anecdotal notes by the instructor either during class while students were writing their original poems or immediately following the class. For example, when a student commented to a peer "count the syllables...did we do it right?...nice job!" these words were documented for later analysis. Qualitative data were read multiple times and annotations were written in the margins of the papers. The anecdotal notes and comments from the open-ended response on the survey were coded (Seidman, 1998). Codes included interest, knowledge, accuracy, engagement, appreciation, and confidence. Data was revisited in light of these codes and themes that emerged included active engagement, increased knowledge, and greater appreciation of poetry.

Findings

A careful analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data revealed several findings: the project assisted pre-service teachers with becoming familiar with various forms of poetry; participants' confidence in their knowledge of poetry increased; and participants gained an appreciation for the potential use of poetry in classrooms.

Learning about Poetry

The study promoted learning about specific types of poetry as evident in the original poems created in class, the responses to item six on the survey, and students' verbal and written comments. Original poems were collected at the end of each session and analyzed for accuracy for the type of poem introduced that day. Out of the 88 poems collected throughout the study, 86 poems (98%) followed the correct format. Two examples of Haiku poems about the topic "Talking" exhibited this accuracy:

Words constantly flow
 Making connections with friends
 Conversations rock!

(Maria, Janelle, and Susan)

Communication
 Is essential in the room
 Among the students

(Anna, Sarah, and Claire)

As is evident in the above examples, the students were able to precisely create an original poem following the 5/7/5 syllable rule for haiku. In the following example, Linda, Chantelle, and Jordan created a cinquain poem to summarize their learning about morning messages. While there are several versions of cinquains, this followed the format where each line has a particular type of word. The first has a noun, the second two adjectives, the third three words ending in "ing," the fourth a phrase and the fifth a noun synonymous with the first line.

Morning Message
 Informational, Helpful
 Reviewing, Welcoming, Greeting
 A message that sets the tone for the day
 A.M. Facts

In addition to being accurate with the format of each type of poem, the content of each reflected the participants' understandings of the language arts subject for that day.

Regarding survey question six, in which students were asked to list some forms of poetry they were familiar with, there were a total of 69 responses on the pre-survey and

127 responses on the post-survey. The nearly double increase of responses is indicative of the additional types of poetry students were able to recall and list following the study. Additionally, the types of poems listed on the pre-survey tended to be vague or general, such as “short poems,” “Shakespeare?” and “poetry that forms shapes.” The responses on the post-survey were very specific, and included types of poems used during the project as well as others that were not introduced in this study. Some examples of participants’ responses included, “haiku,” “acrostics,” “odes,” “sonnets,” “bio poems,” “limericks,” and “couplets.”

Final data sources to support the finding that participants’ knowledge of poetry increased were students’ comments throughout the semester as well as responses to question seven of the survey. For example, one student wrote on the post-survey, “I see now that there are many variations of poetry to interest all students.” At the beginning of the study, students often remarked that they were somewhat familiar with a particular type of poetry, but could not recall the names or details of them. While learning about the acrostic poems, Danielle exclaimed, “I remember those! I just never knew what they were called.” In another instance, Sydney said she had “never heard of diamante poems before” and now she “loved them!”

Increasing Confidence

Anecdotal data gathered throughout the study revealed an increase in participants’ confidence about their knowledge of poetry and their use of it in their future classrooms. These findings were supported by written comments on the post-survey. One student noted that the poems with very specific rules, such as the haiku and cinquain, were beneficial for “beginning poets!” She continued, “This helped me feel more comfortable.” Another student commented about how active learning contributed to her confidence, stating, “I think that doing the activities and actually writing examples of the poems we talked about was helpful.”

It is important to examine the quantitative data from question three on the survey, which is related to confidence in using poetry in the classroom. While there is an increase in mean from the pre- to the post-survey, the difference at $p < .05$ is nearly significant ($t = 1.93$, $p = 0.058$). Taken in conjunction with this theme across the qualitative data, it can be presumed that this study did indeed increase participants’ confidence with the use of poetry in the classroom. Further investigation of this topic would substantiate these findings.

Greater Appreciation of Poetry

As shown in Table 1, the results of the unpaired t -test showed a statistically significant difference in participants’ positive attitudes toward poetry ($t = 3.07$, $p = 0.003$) across the course of the study. This change in attitude was palpable in the classroom and particularly noticeable during the original poem writing time. At the beginning of the study, there was audible grumbling and negative comments about poetry. This was also reflected on the pre-survey through comments such as, “I don’t remember anything about it, or how it would be useful in a classroom other than for rhyming.” Other comments at

the beginning of the study included, “I am *really* not a fan,” and “Poetry has always been difficult for me.” As one student blatantly stated in class, “I don’t like it!” others nodded in agreement.

As the study progressed, students became visibly more engaged in the writing of original poems. Exclamations of “Let’s do this!” and “This is really good!” could be heard from small working groups. Students especially looked forward to sharing the poems during the final minutes of class. One poem in particular was lauded for its originality and thoughtfulness. In this case, participants were asked to individually write a diamante poem after a lesson about writer’s workshop. During the lesson, there was much discussion about how the writer’s workshop was similar to reader’s workshop, and how one influenced the other. As seen below, a diamante poem is a seven line poem in the shape of a diamond. There are several different versions of diamantes. The rules governing this poem were as follows: The first and last lines are opposites; lines two and six are adjectives, and lines three and five are verbs, each describing lines one and seven, respectively; and line four is a phrase for describing both line one and seven. Joanna created the following poem:

Reading
 Fun, creative
 Viewing, feeling, thinking
 We think they are opposites
 Thinking, feeling, viewing
 Creative, fun
 Writing

After reading the poem out loud to the class, Joanna’s classmates cheered and clapped, and asked her to read it again. They checked to make sure it followed the correct rules of the poem, had accurate content, and celebrated her creativity. This impromptu discussion was a visible sign of the participants’ increased interest and enjoyment with poetry.

Several students mentioned their appreciation for poetry as a means for expression. One participant noted, “I feel like poetry is good for expression and instruction.” Another wrote, “I have learned that poetry is about ideas and expressing oneself and that it is not about conventions.” Similarly, another wrote, “Poetry is good when freedom of thought is allowed.” Another participant commented on the post-survey, “Poetry is a great form of expression through words and finding the meaning behind the words...the form they are in can help generate class discussions.” Concurring with the above theme, another participant wrote, “I like how you are able to write freely and express yourself in poetic forms.” General positive comments about poetry on the post-survey included, “I have a new outlook of poetry,” “I like using it as a learning technique,” “I really like the idea of using poetry in the elementary classroom,” and “I have learned that poetry is a very useful tool in the classroom.”

Even amongst the participants who commented that they still did not like poetry at the end of the study, each remarked that they understood the value of it. In class, Karen stated, "Well, I'm still not crazy about it, especially writing, but I can see how it might be helpful for kids." Another student wrote on the post-survey, "I still am not personally a fan, but I understand the merit and importance of poems in the classroom." A little more enthusiastically, Kim said, "I do like it a *little* better now." So while these few students claimed to not like poetry very much, they recognized the potential value of it as an instructional tool.

In light of the qualitative data that points toward a greater appreciation of poetry, it is important to revisit the quantitative data related to this theme. One would expect to see a difference in scores on questions two and five to support this theme. While the mean scores of both measures went up, the differences were not significant. However, the qualitative data and positive comments made by students at the end of the study reveal this increased appreciation.

Discussion and Implications

Since students learn best when they are actively engaged and have multiple exposures to a concept (Breznak & Scott, 2003), it was intended that the activities in this study would help preservice teachers learn about poetry as well as help them process the course content in a meaningful and personal way (Kane & Rule, 2004). These above results may be due in part to the writing of original poems throughout the project, as this mode of language use potentially advanced participants' thinking and learning (Vygotsky, 1962, 1978). The findings of this study showed preservice teachers learning about poetry, increasing in their confidence about using poetry in their future classrooms, and growing in their appreciation of poetry in general. In particular, Table 1 reveals that the increase in participants' positive feelings about poetry was statistically significant. This positive change may be the catalyst for providing preservice teachers with the confidence to use this technique as a learning tool in their future classrooms (Ray, 1999).

Implications of this study for instructors of preservice teachers are related to active learning and innovative teaching techniques. By actively engaging participants in learning and writing about poetry, preservice teachers were able to accomplish both the tasks of learning about course content while also experiencing one of many tools they may utilize in their future teaching to promote student understanding. Interestingly, the task of learning about poetry was accomplished within a rather brief period of time once per week - essentially ten minutes at the beginning and end of each class meeting. This focused attention did not take away from learning the content of the course, but rather provided participants with an additional means for processing information, which concurs with research as noted by Kane and Rule (2004) and Eisner (1985). While poetry was the focus of the current study, the guidelines of active learning and modelling innovative teaching techniques can be applied across a wide range of topics. Instructors of preservice

teachers are accountable for assisting future teachers in gaining a wide repertoire of teaching strategies, one of which is the possibility of using poetry in the classroom.

Limitations

The results of this study may be limited by the sample size and potential biases. This study examined the impact of an intervention with a small number of preservice teachers at one liberal arts university, making generalization of the results difficult. Since the researcher was also the course instructor, researcher bias could have impacted the results. Finally, preservice teachers participated in this study within the context of a graded college course, which may have influenced their responses.

Conclusion

The impact a teacher preparation program has on beginning teachers cannot be underestimated. Beginning teachers often employ strategies and methods they learned in their training (Clark, Jones, Reutzell, & Andreasen, 2013), and their beliefs often reflect those of their training programs (Cunningham, Zibulsky, Stanovich, & Stanovich, 2009). Likewise, knowledge gained through coursework can change the way preservice teachers teach in their forthcoming careers (Hong-Nam and Swanson, 2011). It stands to reason, "Without access to knowledge about pedagogical tools, preservice teachers can not appropriate them" (Leko & Brownell, 2011). Therefore, it is imperative that our teacher education programs reflect research-based teaching techniques. This study revealed the positive impact a brief, but active, intervention can have on preservice teachers' knowledge and feelings about poetry.

It is unclear how the understanding of poetry gained through this project would transfer to teaching in the k-12 setting. However, participants' increase in confidence for using poetry should not be discounted. The correlation between student reading achievement and a teacher's beliefs in helping his or her students learn has been documented (ie. Cantrell, Almasi, Carter, & Rintamaa, 2013; Vartuli, 2005). Therefore, it is quite possible that participants' gain in content knowledge along with increased confidence may result in positive student literacy outcomes in their future classrooms.

As part of the Common Core State Standards movement, all preservice teachers will be required to infuse literacy instruction across content areas. One method for doing so is integrating poetry into various subject matters. While this project was conducted with preservice teachers, it may also serve as a model for professional development with in-service teachers. Short-term professional development programs can have a positive influence on teachers' knowledge base and ultimately student achievement (e.g. Kennedy, 2010; McCutchen, Green, Abbott, & Sanders, 2009). Interventions such as the current project may prove beneficial for both populations of educators in terms of expanding their repertoire of pedagogical practices, which may ultimately increase student success.

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Appendix
Poetry Survey

Scale:

- 1 Very little/ Very negative
- 2 Little/ Negative
- 3 Neutral
- 4 Often/ Positive
- 5 Very often/ Very positive

1. How do you personally feel about poetry? 1 2 3 4 5

2. How often do you feel poetry should be used 1 2 3 4 5
in the elementary classroom?

3. How comfortable would you feel using 1 2 3 4
5
poetry in the classroom?

4. How interested would you be in receiving ideas 1 2 3 4 5
for using poetry in the classroom?

5. Do you feel poetry instruction is beneficial to 1 2 3 4
5
students?

6. List some forms of poetry that you are familiar with:

7. Please share any additional thoughts about poetry:

Fine, J. C., Sanabria, E., and O’Gorman-Fazzolari, C. (2014). How Do I teach ELs with the Common Core? *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online]. Vol. 34.

How Do I Teach ELs with the Common Core?

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Abstract

English Learners (ELs) represent the fastest growing segment of K-12 student populations in the United States (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2002). Minority language speakers are quickly becoming the majority in schools today. Teaching this growing population to become proficient in English is becoming an increasing concern, especially with the implementation of Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This paper explores some of the challenges that teachers of ELs face, as well as research solutions that have been developed to increase the learning environments for ELs. Lastly, this paper includes the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) English Language Development (ELD) Standards as a resource for reading professionals to develop comprehensive language skills while teaching grade level content using the Common Core State Standards

How Do I Teach ELs with the Common Core?

Introduction

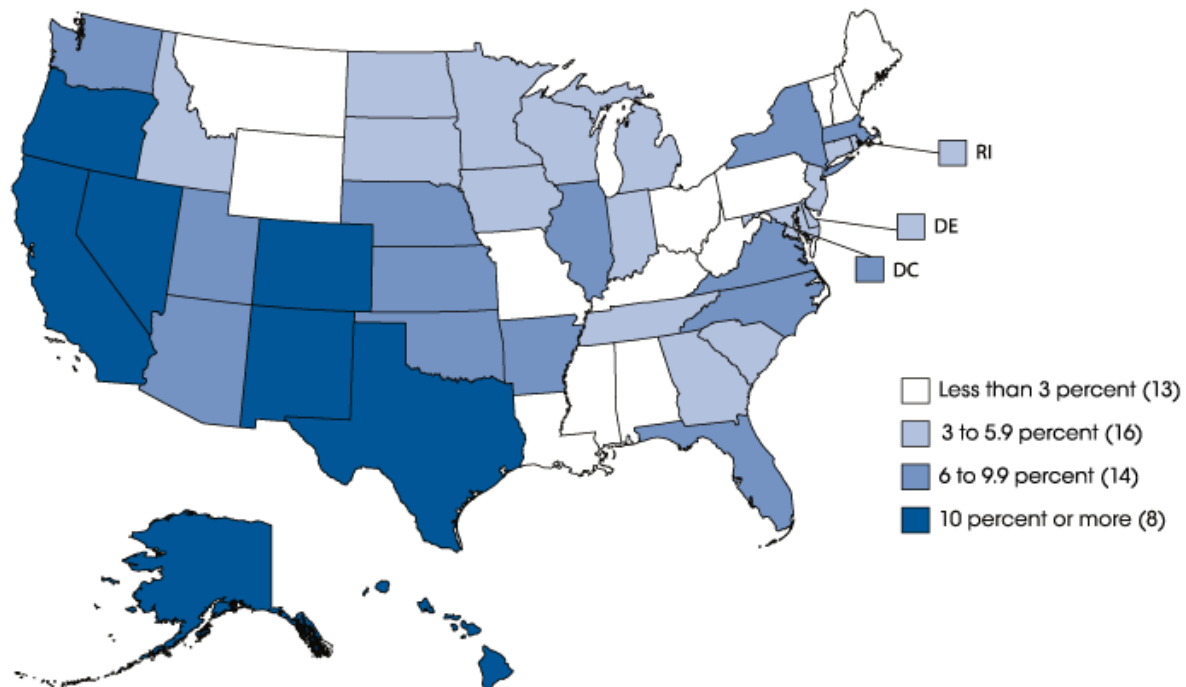
With the increasing number of linguistically and culturally diverse English Learners (ELs) in schools nationwide, efforts have been made to address the need for ideas and solutions that will allow all students access to the curriculum, especially ELs. While working in schools in the last few years, the most often repeated question is, “How do I teach ELs with the Common Core?” Teachers are concerned about raising the level of text complexity, for instance, while consciously addressing the needs of ELs. They are concerned about the students meeting the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and they are also aware that their students’ scores on standardized tests will potentially impact their performance evaluation, thus their income. As part of the Race to the Top funding, teacher’s salaries are tied to the performance of their students. This financial link provides motivation for teachers to embark upon learning and implementing pedagogically appropriate ways to help close the achievement gap between groups of students.

Most notably, educators, educational institutions, and state and federal organizations are posing a transformed approach to educating ELs that embeds an approach that looks at what students are capable of accomplishing, linguistically and academically, instead of what they can’t do. There is an urgency to continue to raise awareness about the challenges and implications that the CCSS have on the education of ELs. This article will present the status of the situation and will introduce and discuss the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) English Language Development (ELD) Standards in an effort to provide a resource for reading professionals to implement the CCSS while developing English language skills.

Statistics about the Growing Numbers of ELs

The population of ELs is the fastest growing population in the U.S. (Calderon, Slavin, & Sanchez, 2011). From the 2002-03 to the 2010-11 school year, the percentage of public school EL students increased from 4.1 to 4.7 million (U.S. Department of Education). Furthermore, by 2025 one out of every four students in the U.S. will be identified as an EL (Van Roekel, 2008). According to the United States Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics National Survey, “Local Education Agency School Universe Survey, for the year 2010-2011,” the percentage of school students who are ELs in many states ranges from less than 3 percent per state to 10 percent or more of the population (See map, Figure 1).

Figure 1. Percentage of public school students who are English language learners (ELL), by state: School year 2010-11



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Local Education Agency School Universe Survey," 2010-11. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2012*, [table 47](#).

On this map, Florida is listed as having 6 to 9.99 percent (over two-hundred thousand students) of the school population as ELs. However, this statistic is skewed because within the state of Florida, the county with the highest concentration of ELs is Miami-Dade County. In the 2012-2013 school year, Miami-Dade County had 70,702 ELs enrolled in their English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) K-12 program out of 353,352 students, or approximately 30% of the state's entire EL population. For the district, there were 235,454 Hispanic students, approximately 2/3 of all the students (Miami-Dade County Public Schools, n.d). Such a large, growing population of ELs in Florida and in many other states only increases the demand for effective literacy instruction.

Perspectives and Challenges

The United States is becoming an increasingly multicultural and multilingual nation with a vast majority of the student population speaking languages other than English as their native language. This trend in immigration impacts schools and English language instruction because immigrant students come to school with oral, and oftentimes written, knowledge of a language other than the one used during instruction. The implementation of the CCSS in Florida (and in many other states throughout the country), as well as the strong emphasis on school, district, and statewide accountability, has greatly impacted the type of literacy instruction English learners are receiving. In *Literacy for All Students*, Sherry W. Powers (2012) argues that immigrant students may have been competent learners in their native country but then display poor performance here because they are

uncertain about the literacy environment (p. 201). This reality provides the platform for a potential mismatch between the cultures of ELs native countries and that of the U.S. as they pertain to reading materials and relevancy. ELs have varying degrees of English language proficiency that may impact their initial attempt of gaining linguistic awareness and skill transfer. Teaching literacy to this array of students requires understanding concepts of second language acquisition, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) strategies and reading professional development and practice. This type of pedagogical knowledge is mandated in Florida through the ESOL Endorsement and teacher certification requirements. Furthermore, the Federal Title III Grant requirements help protect the growing needs of ELs by requiring ESOL certification for those teachers working directly with ELs.

Researching Solutions

To find solutions to the teachers' questions on how to best educate ELs, several suggestions were found. Fortunately, there is not a pre-packaged educational program for this purpose. Instead, a comprehensive understanding of how language and content work together to provide cohesive instruction, instructional strategies, and relevant curricular materials should be used. For example, Helman (2009) suggests that instruction should recognize previous experience as strengths, and Powell and Rightmyer (2012) discuss the importance of bridging reading curricula to the students' world through the use of culturally responsive reading instruction. This type of instruction requires that teachers have an in-depth understanding of the cultural characteristics and contributions of different ethnic groups in order to be able to situate the learning "...within the lived experiences and frames of references of students" (Gay, 2002, p. 106). It also requires that teachers are able to evaluate existing curricula in order to identify its multicultural strengths and weaknesses and thus, make the necessary adjustments in order to provide students with relevant instruction and materials (Gay, 2002). When evaluating curricula, Gay suggests that teachers analyze the accuracy, complexity, placement, purpose, significance, and authenticity of the narrative texts, among other factors. Taking all these factors into account when planning instructional experiences and selecting instructional materials will aid teachers in providing culturally relevant reading instruction to ELs, thus helping to increase their academic achievement (Gay, 2002).

Shanahan and August (2008) proffered that students would benefit from explicit instruction in components of reading, which are phonemic awareness, phonics, reading fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and oral language. With explicit, structured instruction in these areas, students can learn at the same levels as English speakers (Goldenberg, 2010). For example, as it relates to comprehension, Kamil, Mosenthal, Pearson, and Barr (2014) argue that the following five factors influence the comprehension of ELs: attention, encoding (language, genre, vocabulary, or academic contexts differences), strategic processing and self-regulation, background knowledge, and motivation. Hence, when designing, implementing, and assessing ELs performance during reading comprehension tasks, these factors must be considered. Furthermore, when improving the vocabulary skills of ELs, Perez (1981) found that systematic and explicit

instruction in word meanings through the use of synonyms, antonyms, compound words and multiple meanings, led to improvements in the comprehension and oral reading of ELs. This type of instruction is beneficial when helping ELs understand vocabulary and, more specifically, when helping them learn content-specific vocabulary.

McLaughlin (2010) emphasized teaching text structures and others, such as Gay (2002), have suggested motivational and culturally relevant text. Moreover, Rubinstein-Ávila and Leckie (2014) discuss the importance of discipline-specific teacher's ability to make explicit "the language and literacy practices embedded in their discipline" (p.24). They suggest specific strategies that enable students to comprehend complex text. These include using text annotations, which starts with teachers reading a passage to model how to focus on aspects of text in their discipline. Then, students read and note questions and connections they make. For a third reading, students pair together to construct collaborative meaning. In Fisher, Frey, and Rothenberg (2008), Rubinstein-Ávila and Leckie also emphasize the importance of content area, which gives the opportunity for ELs to use academic language in class discussion to develop language and comprehension of disciplinary concepts. All of the above are good suggestions, but to meet the needs of large EL populations, at a time when the demands to meet high standards are a reality, a more systematic approach is needed. The World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) English Language Development (ELD) Standards offers a framework for teachers that combines both content and language instruction to help all ELs, regardless of their language proficiency level, attain the required content knowledge to meet the standards.

English Language Proficiency Standards and the Common Core Standards- World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA)

The State of Florida, Florida's Department of Education and the State Board of Education recently announced that Florida has officially adopted the WIDA English Language Development (ELD) Standards as the guiding student performance standards for language development. This set of standards will accompany the mandated Florida Standards, a modification of the CCSS for use in Florida schools. Florida became the 36th state to adopt the WIDA ELD Standards and to commit to providing a comprehensive instructional framework that utilizes both language and content standards as a foundation for teaching and learning. This decision was in part due to the growing awareness of the complex needs of the increasing EL student population.

"The WIDA ELD Standards represent the social, instructional, and academic language that students need to engage with peers, educators, and the curriculum in schools" (WIDA, 2012, p. 6). In addition, the goal of planning with a combined language and content standards approach is to allow ELs increased access to grade-level curriculum. "An important feature in the WIDA standards framework is an explicit connection to state content standards" (WIDA, 2012, p. 4). Furthermore, the ELD standards emphasize the importance of the development of social and academic language in social and instructional settings.

The ELD standards are characterized by defining the types of language that students will encounter in school: Standard 1- Social and Instructional language, Standard 2- the language of Language Arts, Standard 3- the language of Mathematics, Standard 4- the language of Science and Standard 5- the language of Social Studies. Standards one through five address the varieties of the social and academic language acquisition processes that ELs encounter as they progress through the continuum of developing competencies in English.

An example of the association and correspondence of content to language standards is exemplified in the following example (from the 2012 *Amplification of The English Language Development Standards, Kindergarten-Grade 12* resource guide, p. 101, www.wida.us).

ELD STANDARD 2: The Language of Language Arts						WIDA
						EXAMPLE TOPIC: Bias
CONNECTION: <i>Common Core State Standards, English Language Arts, Reading: Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas #8 (Grades 9–10):</i> Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.						
EXAMPLE CONTEXT FOR LANGUAGE USE: Students learn how to choose appropriate sources for a research project by examining texts (e.g., speech transcripts, websites, editorials) to identify author's bias.						
COGNITIVE FUNCTION: Students at all levels of English language proficiency will EVALUATE author's bias.						
READING	Level 1 Entering	Level 2 Emerging	Level 3 Developing	Level 4 Expanding	Level 5 Bridging	Level 6 Reaching
	Locate language associated with fact and/or opinion from visually supported text with a partner using L1 or L2 and word banks (e.g., "I think", "I believe" v. "data", "fact")	Locate language associated with fact and opinion from visually supported text with a partner using word banks (e.g., "70% of Latinos" v. "almost all Latinos")	Locate language of opinion and bias from excerpts of texts following a model in small groups (e.g., "We as scientists agree..." v. "Scientists everywhere agree...")	Sort language of bias from texts (e.g., by validity of reasoning/evidence) following a model in small groups	Infer author's bias from texts in small groups	
TOPIC-RELATED LANGUAGE: Students at all levels of English language proficiency interact with grade-level words and expressions, such as: bias, claim, argument, relevant evidence, valid reasoning, stereotype						

WIDA ELP Standards © 2007, 2012 Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. WIDA is a trademark of the Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System. For more information on using the WIDA ELP Standards please visit the WIDA website at www.wida.us.

Each part explicitly outlines the development of language and content in a contextualized manner:

- WIDA ELD Standard 2- (ELD) The Language of Language Arts
- Connection: (CCSS) Common Core State Standards, English Language Arts, Reading: Informational Text, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas #8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient: identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.
- Example Topic: Bias

- Example Context for Language Use: Students learn how to choose appropriate sources for a research project by examining texts (e.g., speech transcripts, websites, editorials) to identify author's bias.
- Cognitive Function: Students at all levels of English language proficiency will EVALUATE author's bias.
- Grade: 9-10

As seen in this particular example, when combining the CCSS and ELD standards, EL students at all levels of language proficiency will be required to 'evaluate' the author's bias. This is accomplished by defining a cognitive function (to evaluate) that remains constant for all students. The differentiated instructional activities match what students can do at a particular language proficiency level, as defined by WIDA. The proficiency levels range from one to six: Level 1- Entering, Level 2- Emerging, Level 3- Developing, Level 4- Expanding, Level 5- Bridging and Level 6- Reaching. EL students progress through the continuum of language proficiency levels while acquiring content and more complex language structures. The example provided shows how instructional activities can be differentiated based on a students' language proficiency. A student who is Level 2- Emerging will not be required to accomplish a Level 5- Bridging activity as this is not appropriate for the level of language that the student possesses. EL students must have access to the curriculum at their language proficiency level as to increase competencies and decrease the perpetual achievement gap.

According to the report *The Condition of Education* (2013) by the National Center of Education Statistics, as of 2011 there continues to be an achievement gap in reading between non-English learners and English learners at the fourth and eighth-grade levels, thus making it paramount that educators find and implement new instructional methods in order to ensure that English learners acquire the necessary reading skills while at the same time meeting state-mandated standards. With this in mind, introducing and discussing WIDA's English Language Development standards serves as a stepping stone towards providing English learners appropriate education while continuing our commitment of implementing the CCSS.

Future Directions

There exists a need to build the knowledge base for classroom teachers on how to work with this diverse student population. Teachers need to be prepared how to 1) assess ELs' language levels, 2) use strategies that build social and academic language and 3) differentiate lessons so that ELs are participating at their highest level of language competency while learning grade level content. Emphasis on the development of academic language, the language that appears in other academic areas and the discipline-specific, content vocabulary is also needed. As the foundation for understanding the language development of ELs, teachers must have an in-depth understanding of the two types of language proficiency: Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills refers to the ability to communicate through conversational English. At this level of

English proficiency, students can engage in regular, everyday conversations with their peers because they possess social language skills in English. However, these skills are not sufficient for the linguistic demands of academic content. On the other hand, Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency refers to the ability to understand complex academic language necessary to acquire academic content. It is necessary for teachers to understand the distinction between these two types of language proficiencies in order to set appropriate expectations and adapt instruction based on students' English language proficiency levels (Cummins, 1999).

To close the achievement gap between ELs and native speakers of English, there must be a means to bring this information about effective practices and language acquisition processes to teachers. Mandates from State Departments of Education that require teachers get the necessary professional development so that they are able to teach ELs, such as the one instituted in Florida, a state who has had a tremendous influx of ELs for over 30 years, will help ensure that teachers are prepared to use effective practices with their EL student population and that they understand the language acquisition processes that these students go through. However, such mandates will require much professional development and thus, should be provided at the district level in order to guarantee their quality. The involvement of Reading Coaches would also be beneficial, as they will be able to offer their expertise on reading development. The best way to insure that there is quality professional development, however, is to have this training take place at universities, where experienced faculty in both second language acquisition and reading development and instruction can work together to provide teachers with effective practices that promote the language and cognitive development of ELs.

Lastly, the field would greatly benefit from further research studies on ways to improve EL's achievement in the Language Arts. Quasi-experimental, pretest/post-test designs with the treatment focused on strategies that incorporate reading and writing would perhaps be the most appropriate. One such study focused on using a strategy called Reciprocal Text Structure Mapping (Fine, 2013) took place in a predominantly Haitian high school in Miami. This study found that students were able to increase their vocabulary and writing using evidence from the informational text.

Conclusion

The growing EL student population in the country is a reality and teachers must be prepared to provide effective instruction that meets the needs of these learners while at the same time meeting the learning standards adopted by their state and/or district. One of the most effective approaches of doing this is by marrying language development with content instruction. Ensuring that we are aiming for this level of cognitive development for all students will help make the content accessible and equitable thus providing all students, regardless of their language background, with the opportunity and tools to exceed and reach full potential as learners.

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American Reading Forum Yearbook— Volume XXXIV 2014

Looking Back to Move Ahead with the Common Core State Standards

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Morphemic Decoding Instruction for Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

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Abstract

Community-engaged scholarship places an emphasis on addressing issues of public concern and building capacity in individuals and organizations while testing theory or evaluating practice. In the study reported here, a public school speech and language pathologist contacted a university reading professor to express her concern about the reading difficulties experienced by nine junior high school students on her caseload who were deaf or hard of hearing (D/HH). The students were experiencing significant difficulties in decoding and spelling polysyllabic vocabulary and in reading assignments at their grade level. The objective of the resultant collaboration was to explore the effects of morphemic decoding instruction in addressing the identified difficulties. Nine seventh and eighth graders who were D/HH were provided with weekly lessons for 10 weeks that engaged them in manipulating commonly occurring prefixes and suffixes within real words as they read and generated morphologically complex words. Average growth in a task combining flash and mediated word identification was 2.33 years. The study suggests an important role of community-engaged scholarship in exploring new questions, the potential value of engaging students in constructive morphemic decoding instructional activities, and the need for larger scale studies of morphology instruction involving students who are D/HH.

Morphemic Decoding Instruction for Students Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Introduction

Community engagement “describes the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity” (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, n.d., p. 2). Engaged scholarship partners academics with knowledgeable practitioners from outside the academy. Mutual benefits derive from the learning community formed by researchers and practitioners as they negotiate and collaborate in defining problems and testing solutions, jointly producing knowledge that can enrich research and more readily transfer to practice settings because of the direct participation of practitioners (Boyer, 1996; New England Resource Center for Higher Education, n.d.). Community-engaged scholarship places an emphasis on addressing issues of public concern and building capacity in individuals and organizations while testing theory or evaluating practice.

The morphemic decoding intervention approach described in this paper is an example of community-engaged scholarship. The first author, a reading professor, and the second author, a school-based speech-language pathologist, have collaborated for more than a decade in identifying literacy needs of students with significant disabilities and developing instruction to address those needs. They previously developed a writing intervention that arose from an e-pal collaboration between the first author’s preservice reading methods undergraduates and the second author’s seventh and eighth grade students with significant disabilities (Williams, Koppenhaver, & Wollak, 2007) and a theoretically-grounded and evidence-based writing instructional program for students with significant disabilities (Wollak & Koppenhaver, 2011). On this occasion, the second author expressed a concern about the reading difficulties that the seventh and eighth grade deaf and hard of hearing (D/HH) students on her caseload were experiencing. She explained that all of the students were reading two or more years below their grade level expectations. However, according to an informal reading inventory, all could identify words and read text with comprehension at least at the second grade level. Finally, she noted that all of the students had difficulty in decoding polysyllabic words. Keeping in mind the students’ hearing impairments and reading skill level, as well as the limited time the second author had to work with the students, the first author suggested that perhaps morphemic decoding might be a profitable direction to consider. The objective of this community-based scholarship project thus became the exploration of morphemic decoding instruction as a means of promoting word identification growth in students who are D/HH.

Morphology and Students Who Are D/HH

Morphology is the study of the structure of words (i.e., morph- meaning shape and -ology meaning the study of). Morphological awareness contributes to decoding, spelling, vocabulary knowledge, and reading comprehension in middle grades students (Nagy,

Berninger, & Abbott, 2006). Students encounter an increasing number of morphologically complex words (i.e., words composed of two or more morphemes such as morph-ology, re-match, or industry-al-ize) as they advance in school. Thus, instruction in morphology assists students in interpreting and learning unfamiliar words (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). These instructional effects are even larger for less able readers (Bowers, Kirby, & Deacon, 2010).

The reading achievement of students who are D/HH has remained unchanged, approximately a third to fourth grade median reading comprehension level at high school graduation, in repeated, large-scale, nationwide assessments since 1974 (Qi & Mitchell, 2012). It has been hypothesized that the source of these reading difficulties is ineffective phonological knowledge due directly to hearing loss and indirectly to its associated impact on learning environments and linguistic experience (Gaustad, 2000; Miller, 2007). Studies of skilled readers who are D/HH suggest that they understand and apply morphological knowledge in reading and spelling, and may be more advanced in their reading partially because of this skill (Hanson & Feldman, 1989; Hanson, 1993). Morphemes may be more accessible and provide indirect access to phonology, because students who are D/HH can access them visually during regular reading activity (Gaustad & Kelly, 2004).

Improved morphological knowledge may have more to do with degree of linguistic and print experience than reading skill. A study of spelling strategies in two groups of French students with D/HH, 29 students with a mean age of 10.9 years and 44 students, mean age 13.3 years, of varying reading abilities, found that younger students were more likely to spell words with reference to surface phonological structure but that older students were more likely to spell by analogy to words with similar morphemic structure (Leybaert & Alegria, 1995). The data suggested an increasing trend toward morphology use for spelling after the second year of formal reading instruction comparable to that reported in hearing children (e.g., Anglin, Miller, & Wakefield, 1993).

Morphological knowledge in readers who are D/HH appears to follow a normal developmental pattern but lag significantly behind that of hearing students. In a comparison of morpheme perception and application tasks in young adolescents and college students, college students who were D/HH scored similarly to hearing young adolescents, 12 to 15 years old, whose mean reading comprehension scores were 1.4 grade levels below those of the students who were D/HH (Gaustad, Kelly, Payne, & Lylak, 2002). All students' performance declined as task difficulty increased, but the decline was greatest among young adolescents who were D/HH. In a re-analysis of these data, Gaustad & Kelly (2004) examined individual hearing young adolescents paired more precisely on reading ability with individual college students who were D/HH. Hearing students were superior in their understanding and use of derivational morphemes and roots and in their segmentation of morphologically complex words despite the overall reading ability match. Taken together, these studies suggest that while students who are D/HH can acquire morphological knowledge they may need carefully structured

interventions in order to more efficiently progress toward the breadth, depth, and automaticity of understanding and application found in hearing students.

Gaustad (2000) proposed that teaching D/HH students morphology using printed words, what she called “morphographic analysis,” would enable them to circumvent the necessity of acquiring mastery of English phonology and applying phonics in decoding. That is, she recommended that students engage in morphographic analysis (e.g., -s in dogs; -ing in reading) even in beginning reading instruction. She argued that this would create a more efficient route to word identification by eliminating the need for phonemic awareness while requiring intent to analyze words, visual skills and segmental awareness (both orthographic and morphologic), as well as experience with printed words and the meanings they encode. Nielsen, Luetke, and Stryker (2011) concurred and argued for the use of Signing Exact English (SEE) as a means of making morphology even more visible to students who are D/HH.

Despite long-standing and repeated calls for morphology instruction in the classrooms serving students who are D/HH, only a single published study could be identified that attempted to assess the effects of morphology instruction for these students (Bow, Blamey, Paatsch, & Sarant, 2004). The morphology instruction offered in this study focused on present tense (e.g., he walks, they walk), past tense (e.g., I liked, you liked), and plurals (e.g., cat, cats) using games, worksheets, stories, and puzzles. Students, ages 5 – 11 years who were D/HH, received instruction in age-similar groups involving judgment and speech perception tasks.

In sum, the research suggests that morphological knowledge is important to readers who are D/HH. They appear to develop morphological knowledge as they gain linguistic and reading experience but at a much slower rate than hearing students. Scholars have called for the inclusion of morphology in reading instruction programs serving students who are D/HH. However, there are no studies examining the reading outcomes of morphology interventions, nor is there any guidance regarding what such interventions might look like for practitioners wishing to respond to this call.

Theoretical and Practical Perspectives

The English spelling system is morphophonemic, representing both units of sound (i.e., phonemes) and units of meaning (i.e., morphemes). While scholars acknowledge the importance of meaning in decoding and spelling (Adams, 1990; Bowers, Kirby, & Deacon, 2010), the place of morphemes in learning to read has not been clearly delineated (Carlisle & Stone, 2005). It is clear, however, that adolescent readers use morphemes in decoding more efficiently (Nagy, Berninger, & Abbott, 2006) and in comprehending text more effectively (Carlisle, 2000). It is equally clear that students who are D/HH acquire morphological knowledge but that their degree of understanding and use of that knowledge lags significantly behind hearing students (Gaustad & Kelly, 2004). Finally, it has been observed that more than half of the words in English are morphologically complex and that these words are encountered with increasing frequency in the texts that

children read as they progress through school and beyond (Nagy & Anderson, 1984). Young adolescent students, especially those who are D/HH and possess word identification skills significantly below their grade placement, require, among other skills, improved ability to decode and spell morphologically complex words.

Methods

Participants

Nine seventh and eighth grade students, who met the state's criteria for D/HH services, were enrolled in the D/HH program of an urban junior high school in the upper Midwest. The students' degree of hearing loss ranged from mild to profound, and English was not the first language spoken in the homes of two of the students.

The school system mandated informal reading assessments for all students. On the word identification subtest of the *Qualitative Reading Inventory – 3* (QRI-3) (Leslie & Caldwell, 2000), the group ranged from second to fifth grade ($M = 3.6$). Scores on the Qualitative Inventory of Word Knowledge (Short Form) were comparable, ranging from third to fifth grade ($M = 3.5$) (Schlagal, 2003). Finally, the second author also administered the Word Writing Café (Leal, 2005/2006) as a generative assessment of the students' word writing accuracy, fluency, and complexity. For the group, total words correctly spelled ($M=82.1$) and one-syllable words generated ($M=53.7$) were third grade equivalent. Two-syllable words ($M=24.2$) were fourth/fifth grade equivalent and three-syllable words ($M=3.8$) fourth grade. Only one student produced any four-syllable words, writing three of them. Together the three assessments suggested that the students' decoding and spelling of individual words were well below grade level expectations but well beyond beginning levels. That is, their reading and spelling of words demonstrated good understanding of letter-sound correspondences but difficulty with syllables and morphemes as words increased in length.

At the conclusion of the intervention, which also mirrored the end of the school year, the second author chose to devote what limited instructional time remained to student learning and consequently was able to readminister only the word identification subtest of the QRI-3 but none of the other word measures.

Existing Instruction

The students were included in many regular education classes with their hearing peers, so reading demands were significant. All participated in a daily, specialized English class that was taught by their homeroom teacher, a D/HH teacher, who was deaf herself. All instruction throughout the day was signed by either an American Sign Language (ASL) interpreter or the D/HH teacher. Because so much of their reading was assigned in texts well above their reading levels, the D/HH teacher had to sign, explain, and discuss each assignment with them in order to help them understand the material. Writing instruction was limited and focused almost entirely on exercises in grammar and conventions. No decoding or spelling instruction was provided.

Speech-Language Services

The second author is a licensed speech and language pathologist, who was assigned to provide speech and language services for students in the junior high school's D/HH program. Most of the students received her services for 60 minutes per week. She split her time with the group, providing small group instruction focused on speech intelligibility and language comprehension goals in the students' Individual Education Programs, and collaborating once a week with the D/HH teacher to teach a whole group reading comprehension lesson. One of the first indications that these students might have a deficit in morpheme knowledge occurred during speech intelligibility interventions. Almost all of the students with speech intelligibility goals regularly omitted morphemes in their speech (saying, e.g., *work* when they meant *worked* or *working*).

Intervention Selection

Our reading and discussion of the research literature provided little specific guidance as to a morphological instructional method for these students, so we took a pragmatic approach. Reading and writing assessments showed that the students had little difficulty reading or spelling one and two-syllable words, but they were more limited in their success with morphologically complex words, which they encountered with great frequency in their regular classroom reading assignments. All of the students had significant language needs, so we chose to avoid metalinguistic instructional approaches that might have them labeling types of words, categorizing word origins, or using print jargon (e.g., Henry, 1988), and instead sought instructional programs that would present morphemes in multiple contexts and require their use in order to learn to read and spell them. We knew that many students with disabilities whom we had taught previously had learned well by analogy, comparing and contrasting what they knew about letter-sound relationships, and so we thought they might do well using a similar approach with morphemes. We knew that students who are D/HH had struggled in learning to read and spell words in the past, so the instructional approach would need to be engaging and intensive.

We considered what we knew about the instructional opportunity. The school was about to begin its final trimester, and the second author had just 25 minutes weekly to provide any direct intervention. The extremely limited time available for instruction meant that there was no time for a developmental approach requiring further assessment or the use of instructional groups (e.g., Schlagal, 2001); the instruction would need to be delivered to the whole group simultaneously.

After much searching and discussion, we settled on the use of the Nifty Thrifty 50, a list of 50 words composed of common prefixes, suffixes, and spelling changes that enable students to spell many additional words once they learn the list (Cunningham & Allington, 2010). The program required no further assessment or grouping of students to implement, taught morphemes through use and analogy, and was implemented whole class. Two books provided clear descriptions of engaging instructional activities to employ with words on the list (Arens, Loman, & Cunningham, 2007; Cunningham & Hall, 1998),

and the second author augmented those ideas with Gill's (2007) ideas on using technology and graphic organizers to engage student interest using visual demonstrations of morpheme meanings and relationships.

Intervention Implementation

There was no time and little flexibility in the students' schedule to provide the needed intervention, so the second author created it. She was already meeting once a week with two of the students during their homeroom period. With the cooperation of the D/HH teacher, she was able to turn that 25-minute small group session into a weekly, whole class lesson in morphology for ten of the final 11 weeks of school. The second author taught two to three words and their component morphemes to the group each week. Because the second author had only a rudimentary knowledge of ASL, the D/HH teacher read her lips during the lessons and provided the students with ASL signed output. The second author also used a computer and LCD projector to guide the students through each lesson.

The second author began each lesson by displaying the two to three target words one at a time via the LCD projector. She also held up the words, which had been printed on tagboard, and asked if any of the students could read each word. Typically several students would make an attempt. Next the group would read each word aloud before chorally fingerspelling and chanting it.

The group discussed how to figuratively crack the word apart, making it easier to pronounce and understand the meaning. For the word *encouragement*, for example, the group broke the word into *en-*, *courage*, and *-ment*. The second author then asked, "Does anyone know what *encouragement* means?" She taught the students to use a three-finger strategy, raising one finger if they had never heard of the word, two if they had heard the word but didn't know what it meant, and three if they could use it in a sentence. That feedback enabled her to determine how much depth and breadth of experience to provide with the target word.

The second author used Inspiration software (<http://www.inspiration.com/>) to display each word and its morphemes as it was cracked apart. The group discussed possible meanings of prefixes like *en-* and suffixes like *-ment*, but spent the majority of time talking about the root word. In this example it was *courage*. Each student tried to make a connection to the root word. The goal was to increase the breadth and depth of each student's knowledge of the target words. In this example, one student talked about attending Camp Courage, while another talked about his favorite movie, *The Wizard of Oz*, and how the lion sought courage. A third student talked about the courage it took him to wear his hearing aids in public. The group also brainstormed words that contained the root word *courage*, providing *courageous* and *encourage*. Figure 1 shows what this discussion looked like projected in Inspiration.



Figure 1. Displaying Meaning Connections of Target Word in Inspiration.

For the final instructional activity of each session, groups of three students were given index cards of all the morphemes introduced in that lesson, and asked to combine the word parts to create as many words as possible. Results were then shared with the entire class. For the lesson involving encouragement, composer, and discovery, the students created dispose, encourage, and discouragement (see Figure 2). They did not compile an exhaustive list, leaving off many additional possibilities (e.g., poser, compose, discover). However, as they gained experience and accumulated more morphemes across the weeks, the lists became much more elaborated.



Figure 2. Sample morphemes identified in a three-word lesson.

Words that had been taught in each list were added to a Nifty Thrifty Fifty word wall in the classroom, where students could reference them, and the D/HH teacher could reinforce their use during instructional activities.

Results

The second author observed that the students were engaged by the constructive and interactive nature of the intervention, eager to share their personal connections with the morphemes of each lesson's targeted words. Within a few lessons, the students became reasonably proficient at breaking apart each morphologically complex example. Lessons were punctuated by regular cries of, "I get it!" Students reported that their favorite part of the lesson was creating new words in small peer groups from the cumulating morphemes. Groups competed for the longest list of real words from the available morphemes, checking their creations (and often those of groups with longer lists) in dictionaries to make sure they were real words.

With the intervention going so well, with such limited time available to work with the students, and with so few weeks left in school, the second author was reluctant to interrupt instruction to carry out post-testing. She did readminister the word identification subtest of the QRI-3. Eight of the nine students improved at least two grade levels from the beginning of the school year ($M=3.56$) to the end ($M=5.89$). This represented a substantial shift from the students' previous word identification progress, which had averaged approximately .5 years growth per school year (i.e., 3.5 grade levels in seven years of school).

Further review and informal assessments of the child who showed no growth, scoring second grade level on both pre- and post-tests, revealed that prior to entering the junior high school, she had received exclusively sight word instruction with an emphasis on rote memorization. While she could score at a second grade level in word identification using her knowledge of sight words, she did not understand basic letter-sound correspondences, let alone the complexities of the internal structures of words at the morpheme level. She likely would have benefitted more from instruction emphasizing letter-sound relationships and rime patterns (Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston, 2008; Nagy, Berninger, & Abbott, 2006).

Discussion

This example of community-engaged scholarship was initiated by a practitioner's working knowledge and hands-on experience in a classroom serving young adolescents who were D/HH and finding learning to decode and spell significant challenges. There was a "mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, n.d., p. 2). The first author shared interpretations of the research literature and identified instructional materials, the second author knowledge of deaf education, speech and language methods, and classroom practice. The first author learned about the practical limitations placed on public school personnel seeking to improve the learning of young adolescent students who lag significantly behind peers in literacy learning, information that has been integrated into a reading methods class he teaches for undergraduate special education majors. The second author added a whole class method of morphemic decoding instruction to her repertoire and had reinforced for her how motivating

understandable materials and strategies, peer interactions, and technology integration can be for struggling learners. Ultimately, a public concern (i.e., a speech-language pathologist's frustration with the slow acquisition of decoding and spelling skills in seventh and eighth graders who are D/HH) led to capacity building (i.e., both the first author and the D/HH teacher gained sufficient experience and understanding to incorporate morphemic decoding instruction into their repertoires) while evaluating practice (i.e., the effects of a particular instructional approach on word identification of students who are D/HH).

Limitations

There are obvious limitations to this study that must be acknowledged. The greatest of these are the lack of a formal intervention design (e.g., single subject experiment or control group), the absence of standardized measures of decoding and spelling, and the lack of follow-up. The lack of a formal intervention design means we cannot attribute student outcomes directly to the intervention. It is clear from an informal word identification assessment and the second author's in-class observations while teaching that students increased their ability to seek out morphemes in polysyllabic words and to use them to decode and understand new words. It is not clear that these gains can be attributed to the intervention. Logical arguments can be made, of course, including the annual rate of decoding growth prior to the study (i.e., approximately .5 grade levels per year) that suddenly and simultaneously soared with the introduction of the intervention program.

Similarly, the absence of standardized measures of decoding and spelling leaves student gains open to challenge. Given the single, informal measure administered both pre- and post-intervention, perhaps the students merely learned the words on the assessment rather than a strategy for more effectively decoding morphologically complex words. Again, logical arguments can be made. First, the second author knew the words on both the QRI-3 subtest and the Nifty Thrifty Fifty and did not observe overlap. Second, as an experienced clinician, she provided students with no feedback as to the correctness of their responses during either pre- or post-testing. Finally, both educators and the students themselves observed changes in student understanding and use of morphemes both during lessons and in regular education reading assignments.

Follow-up was not possible because the second author was assigned to a new group of students with significant disabilities the following school year, and the D/HH program was moved to a different school. Such are the challenges of community-engaged scholarship in public schools and the realities of public school experiences for students and educators.

Educational Significance

While scholars have called for increased instruction in morphemic decoding strategy instruction for students who are D/HH, no one has specified what that instruction should look like. The current study employed an existing curriculum, the Nifty Thrifty

Fifty, with clear instructional guidelines (Cunningham & Hall, 1998; Arens, Loman & Cunningham, 2007). The program is structured, easily supported visually, engaging for students and educators, and enables students to manipulate morphemes as they learn to read and use them generatively. The curriculum and instruction are research-based (see, e.g., Nagy, Berninger, & Abbott, 2006; Nippold & Sun, 2008), and we observed positive changes in students' decoding and spelling abilities. We would encourage educators who may explore this approach to look for learning effects in their students by employing either periodic assessments, or pre- and post-test measures, of word identification, spelling, vocabulary generation, and silent reading comprehension.

Scientific Importance

Some scholars have proposed that morphology may be an alternative route to learning to read for students who are deaf (e.g., Gaustad, 2000), while others have suggested there is no escaping the need for phonology in learning to read, regardless of deafness or degree of hearing impairment (e.g., Perfetti & Sandak, 2000). Students in the current study seemed to benefit from experience searching for commonly occurring morphemes in real words and using them to decode and spell additional words. These informal results suggest an alternative instructional approach that may be more (cost-) effective and efficient than those proposed to date, which involve metalinguistic labeling and categorizing (e.g., Gaustad, 2000) or use of Signed Exact English (Nielsen, Luetke, & Stryker, 2011). Reading scholars might contribute significantly to questions such as this by examining the effects of different morphology instructional methods or programs on a range of literacy learning outcomes (e.g., decoding, spelling, vocabulary, silent reading comprehension, or reading fluency). The real test, of course, is not whether students learn the morphemes taught but whether they can employ that knowledge in generalizing to the reading and spelling of other morphologically complex words in text-based reading and writing.

Students, who are D/HH, present interesting challenges to literacy practitioners and reading scholars. These students lack a conventional understanding of the speech sounds represented in orthography, often lack the clarity of speech underlying speech to print or print to speech instructional approaches, and employ a language system in American Sign Language that is visual and signed rather than heard and spoken. In the informal intervention described here, students who are D/HH were taught a set of high frequency morphemes, a means of searching for meaning units in longer words, and a method for comparing and contrasting in order to use what they were learning to read and spell new words containing those morphemes. Given the apparent efficiency of the approach in student learning relative to financial investment or instructional time allocation, further examination in larger-scale, more tightly-constructed studies is warranted.

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Watson, P.A., Johnson, H., Harkness, S. S. (2014). What's wrong with the Core? Analyzing the common concerns around disciplinary literacy and the use of expository texts. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online]. Vol. 34.

What's Wrong with the Core? Analyzing the Common Concerns around Disciplinary Literacy and the Use of Expository Texts

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Abstract

The Common Core State Standards call for the increased use of nonfiction texts and for an increased emphasis on the close reading of complex texts. As educators attempt to meet the demands of the new standards, they continue to struggle to meet the reading requirements across all disciplines. We assert that a new lens, one of disciplinary literacy, is required. In this paper, we examine the issues related to the increased use of expository texts. Woven throughout our definitions and analyses of the issues are threads from the discussions generated during a Problems Court session at the American Reading Forum (December, 2013).

What's Wrong with the Core? Analyzing the Common Concerns around Disciplinary Literacy and the Use of Expository Texts

The Common Core State Standards (NGO, 2010) call for public schools to increase the use of nonfiction so that by 12th grade students will be reading more informational texts than fictional literature. As a result, many schools have searched for ways to replace poetry and novels with expository texts such as essays and technical manuals. Proponents of the new standards maintain that this change toward informational texts creates reading across all subjects, not just in English class. Thus, teachers in social studies, science, and math would require more reading, allowing English teachers to focus on creative writing and literature. We embrace Smagorinsky's (2001) definition of text, which "refers to any configuration of signs that provide a potential for meaning" (p. 137), as well as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that refer to the use of an "extensive range of print and nonprint texts in media forms old and new" (Introduction to ELAR Standards). However, in practice, much of the discussion has centered around the requirements for the increased reading of informational texts.

In addition, the new standards emphasize close reading of increasingly complex texts. While the CCSS define text complexity with a complicated three-part model, the focus is on getting students to read independently the range and type of texts required to be college and career ready. As states, districts, schools, teachers, and teacher educators attempt to adopt curriculum and adapt instruction to meet the requirements of the new standards, they continue to struggle with a way to meet the reading requirements across all disciplines. Literacy standards (6-12) are predicated on teachers in ELA, social studies, science, and technical subjects using their content area expertise to help students meet the particular challenges of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language in their respective fields. We assert that a new lens, one of disciplinary literacy, is required.

Over the past decade, conversation and research related to literacy in content areas have shifted from the idea of teaching cognitive strategies for making sense of text to a disciplinary approach, which is a more complex view of literacy instruction that addresses the literacy demands specific to content areas. This approach is based in the belief that deep knowledge of a discipline is best acquired by engaging in the literate habits valued and used by experts in that discipline (McConachie, Petrosky, & Resnick, 2009; Moje, 2008; Lee & Spratley, 2010). Through reading, writing, and thinking in ways common to the discipline, students deepen their knowledge and understanding of disciplinary content. Disciplinary literacy is not simply a new term for content area literacy, but embodies a new emphasis on the knowledge, skills, and cognitive tools used by experts in each discipline. Through this lens, teachers would better address the new curricular structure, as well as new expectations for planning and delivering instruction in ways that address the literacies embedded in all content areas. Disciplinary literacy deals with how knowledge is constructed in different disciplines and with how language is used to communicate knowledge. (Draper, Broomhead, Jensen, Nokes, & Siebert, 2010; Johnson & Watson, 2011; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). There remains, however, concern about

how teachers and literacy educators become more fluent at addressing the literacy requirements of disciplinary literacy. It seems that content area teachers and literacy specialists must work together to develop an understanding of which tools will be most useful for students in comprehending and constructing the texts of a discipline. Dialogue between disciplinary experts and their literacy colleagues is necessary to identify and refine these tools (Brozo, Moorman, Meyer, & Stewart, 2013; Johnson & Watson, 2011).

In this paper, we will examine the issues related to the increased use of expository texts and discuss: a) the problems of structure and organization b) the problems of definitions c) the problem of limited knowledge, and d) the problem of access. Woven throughout our definitions and analyses of the issues are threads from the discussions generated during a Problems Court session at the American Reading Forum (December, 2013). While recognizing that many elements of the Common Core State Standards hold great potential, our purpose was to organize a forum for defining and discussing problems with the Core from a consumer's point of view, the view of the practicing educator.

The Issues

A Problem of Structure

Based on a decades old industrial revolution model of education, the structure and culture of most instruction in schools today creates silos of instruction. Instruction is focused on teaching the curriculum content in isolation rather than through integration. Within the CCSS, the single K–5 section listing standards for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language across the curriculum reflects the notion that most or all of the instruction students in these grades receive comes from one teacher. Today's reality is that even in elementary grades, self-contained classrooms are no longer the norm. Departmentalization occurs as early as the primary grades, largely in an attempt to prepare students for high stakes state tests organized around isolated content areas.

In essence, the structure of the CCSS assumes integration of content. The standards are organized into two broad categories, English Language Arts and Math. In grades 6-12, the content areas of Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects are included under the umbrella of English Language Arts, albeit in a separate section. While some math literacy is included in the ELA standards under the heading of "Technical Subjects," the actual standards for mathematics are separate and apart from the ELA standards. While the literacies of the other disciplines are *completely* integrated with the ELA standards and clearly identified, the math literacies are difficult to tease out in either the ELA or Math standards, often requiring consumers of the text to read between the lines. Math remains in a separate content silo that lacks any clear literacy referencing, which questions the assumptions of the creators of the CCSS and their beliefs about content integration and the role math plays in K-12 curricular structure.

Because of this new organizational convention, issues of responsibility and accountability have arisen. Teachers, accustomed to teaching in their instructional silos, traditionally are solely responsible for the delivery of their own content. They lack

experience with the literacies of their disciplines and have rarely integrated their content with that of other disciplines. While the CCSS provide an opportunity for moving towards a new model of curricular structure and organization with potential for developing transferable, applicable skills and knowledge for learners, this new structure cannot be implemented without significant resources, time, and professional development. The structure and organization of the CCSS in juxtaposition to current organization of curriculum and instruction in our schools just does not fit.

The Problems Court Discussion

The problem of structure as discussed in the Problems Court provided insight from our colleagues on a number of different issues related to the structure and organization of the CCSS. Contributions centered on issues of responsibilities and unrealistic expectations. Several participants commented on the apparent disconnect between the CCSS and the realities of schools. A theme emerged that reoccurred throughout the discussion of all the issues of the day: *the difficulty of implementation*. Participants repeatedly acknowledged the potential for reform, but concluded that implementation of the standards was the problem. The structure of the CCSS offers opportunities for literacy specialists to provide support and professional development for disciplinary teachers in authentic contexts, but many of our literacy colleagues have had little experience with or opportunities to study literacies of the disciplines. Content teachers, based on experiences with textbooks that are too difficult for their students to read, often assert that the integration of literacy is an unrealistic demand. In our view, the important issue that literacy professionals and other educators can address is the resolution of the disjuncture between the organization of the CCSS and the organizational structures most commonly found in today's schools. The gap in the realities between the CCSS and schools makes implementation difficult, a concern that echoed the thoughts of P. David Pearson in his American Reading Forum keynote address. The CCSS are solidly grounded in theory and research, but enacting them may prove difficult (Pearson, 2013).

A Problem of Definition

A second issue discussed in the Problems Court focused on definition, which included two sub-concerns. Upon analysis of the CCSS, we found there were problems of defining complex text and the concept of task.

The problem of defining complex text. First is the definition of complex text presented by the standards. A statement in Appendix A of the CCSS (2010) asserts: One of the key requirements of the CCSS for reading is that all students must be able to comprehend texts of steadily increasing complexity as they progress through school. By the time they complete the Core, students must be able to read and comprehend independently and proficiently the kinds of complex texts commonly found in college and careers (p. 2). Upon reading this statement, we wondered about the complex texts commonly found in colleges, as academic freedom allows the professoriate to use any number and type of texts they choose for knowledge construction and dissemination. Literacy experts have identified specific factors that make a text complex or challenging.

These factors include vocabulary, sentence structure, organization, cohesion, and readers' background knowledge (Fang & Pace, 2013; Shanahan, Fisher, & Frey, 2012). These experts recommend teachers examine texts used for these elements and teach students strategies for addressing them. However, the CCSS uses a more formulaic model of text complexity.

The CCSS recommends a "three-part" model for determining complexity. The parts include: 1) quantitative measures (i.e. readability), 2) qualitative measures (i.e. text friendliness), and 3) reader and task considerations (i.e. motivation, knowledge, and purpose). Two of these criteria require a human element in evaluating complexity, with the third being determined by "grade bands" of text complexity using Lexile levels (a readability measure done by computer analysis). Quite often publishers use the quantitative Lexile levels to establish levels of complexity, a method that ignores the elements of complexity most closely related to schema, prior knowledge, and strategies needed for successfully navigating texts.

In addition, the expectation delineated in the CCSS is for students to read increasingly larger percentages of informational text. The CCSS call for a 50/50 ratio of informational to literary texts in kindergarten, increasing to 70/30 by 12th grade. This 70% relates to the reading students do across the day, in all content areas and subjects. The fact that narrative or literary texts have represented a disproportionately large portion of what is read in schools, especially in the elementary grades, has long been documented by research (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Duke, 2010; Kamberlis, 1998). Most literacy experts would support the need for complex informational texts. Considering the literacies of the disciplines, appropriate informational texts in many forms and genres are needed. The problem once again, however, is in the implementation.

The CCSS explicitly state that literacy instruction should be a shared responsibility involving teachers from all disciplines, emphasizing the need for students to read complex texts in a variety of content areas. Yet, anyone who has had a recent conversation with a teacher or administrators, or who has read teachers' discussions on the internet, knows that the intended shared responsibility has not become practice. English teachers are expected to shift their curriculums away from the literature, which is their academic content and background, to include informational texts from other content areas. Much of the burden of the required 50-70% across the grades levels in K-12 classrooms falls to them. Upon analysis of the standards, teaching students to read complex texts, no matter the content, is defined as the job of the English and Reading teachers.

Further complicating the use of "texts" in the Common Core is the issue of the exemplar texts. Appendix B of the ELA standards presents a list of titles designed to "serve as useful guideposts in helping educators select texts of similar complexity, quality, and range for their own classrooms" (p. 2). According to the standards, these exemplars should not represent a partial or complete reading list. The lists are constructed in bands of difficulty (e.g., K-1, 2-3, 6-8) and include multiple text types (e.g., stories, read aloud titles,

nonfiction, drama, poetry). In order to show complexity, excerpts from most exemplars are included. Because publishing copyright was financially burdensome, the lists contain many decades old titles. There is little diversity or representation of global cultures. In many instances, exemplar texts for the content areas lack opportunities for application. For example, exemplars related to math include nonfiction texts about building cathedrals and about people who are mathematically illiterate. These types of texts do not expose students to current real life situations where mathematical problem solving is required. The exemplars ignore the fact that the purpose of math is to solve problems.

Despite the explicitness of the purpose stated in Appendix B, many districts and schools are interpreting the exemplars as a core list to be used for instruction. Publishers are reprinting out-of-print titles, creating sets of Common Core texts for purchase. This misinterpretation of the definition of exemplar texts limits students to readings that lack diversity and contemporary relevance.

The problem of defining “task.” A second problem associated with definition is that of tasks. The CCSS specify that students should be engaged in reading closely “to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it.” The phrase “close reading” is being interpreted in many ways and has become the guiding concept for literacy curriculum and instruction developed around the CCSS. So just what is the task of “close reading?” While the CCSS leave states, schools, and teachers a great deal of freedom in how the standards should be interpreted and addressed, the *Publishers’ Criteria* for the CCSS (Coleman & Pimentel, 2011) is very prescriptive. This document requires materials published for Common Core curriculums to include “[a] significant percentage of tasks and questions are text dependent” (p. 6).

Text dependent tasks are being defined as requiring readers to hold their prior knowledge at bay, and to attend only to what is found within the four corners of the page. While the standards themselves seem grounded in the understandings of comprehension that have emerged from cognitive research over the past 40 years (Pearson, 2013), the *Publisher’s Criteria* seem to disregard what we know about the importance of the prior knowledge and experience a reader brings to the text. The problem comes then when publishers (and therefore teachers) follow the narrowly defined “criteria” for close reading, rather than the CCSS themselves, which expect students to “actively seek [a] wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational texts that builds knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens world views” (p. 3) Again, the problem comes in the implementation.

The problems court discussion. In discussion around issues of the definitions, our colleagues noted the need for student engagement with relevant texts and tasks. Participants expressed concern that the CCSS result in instruction that is not engaging for students, especially those who are identified as most at risk. Much political and academic effort (e.g., NCLB, 2001) over the past decade focused on closing the achievement gap between advantaged and less advantaged students. Relevance and engagement with

literacy is a critical element in addressing this gap, yet the CCSS do not explicitly address this critical non-cognitive element.

Continuing with the theme of relevance, one participant asked about the applicability of the CCSS for the rural populations with whom she works. Many of the students in rural schools choose not to attend college, but enter a trade school or apprenticeship. While the standards espouse the goal of college and career readiness for all students, this participant felt that the standards have little relevance to the future careers of many rural students.

The consensus from the court participants was that the problems, identified in conjunction with the definition of text and the exemplars listed in the standards, make teachers' difficult work of connecting school content to students' real worlds an even more challenging task. The idea of holding prior knowledge at bay widens the gap between school and life. Once again, the theories and intent behind the texts and tasks included in the Common Core are reasonable, but the implementation delineated by the *Publisher's Criteria* is at odds with the practices of many excellent teachers.

The Problem of Teacher Knowledge

Implementation of any educational reform, no matter how well thought out and appropriate, always necessitates changes in teachers' daily processes and practices. With changes in the standards that now provide the basis for the curriculum, many teachers find themselves required to teach content they had not previously taught, through methods they had not previously used. In 2012, the National Council of Teachers of English issued a resolution on Teacher Expertise and the Common Core State Standards. This resolution states:

The weight of research and professional expertise about the teaching of literacy compel us to assert that teacher knowledge, skills, and judgment are paramount in implementing Common Core State Standards and other state standards for student learning. The current educational landscape creates tensions for teachers who are trying to align the standards with the needs of their students, schools, and communities. (NCTE, 2012, np)

These tensions are created when changes to the standards necessitate that teachers gain both content and pedagogical knowledge. Often there is little support, little time, and few resources for making changes. Issues related to teacher knowledge and the CCSS include 1) concerns around disciplinary expertise and pedagogical knowledge, and 2) knowledge of literacy and literature, 3) knowledge of the literacy tasks specified within the CCSS document, and 4) the problem of access to the knowledge.

The problem of pedagogical and disciplinary expertise. Teachers in grades K-5 are typically generalists. Their preparation programs characteristically focus on pedagogy with little preparation in science, math technology, or social studies beyond the general education courses required of all students. Teachers in the middle and secondary grades,

on the other hand, have preparation programs heavy in courses from the content disciplines in which they are seeking licensure. These courses are usually designed for students specializing in that discipline, and do not address the pedagogical needs of education students who will deliver that content to secondary students.

The lack of content knowledge at the elementary level often limits the knowledge base of K-5 teachers who are establishing the foundation of knowledge for grade 6-12 learning. In turn, secondary teachers further limit students' knowledge base because the textbooks are often too difficult to negotiate, creating students who enter college without the background necessary to acquire disciplinary expertise. This cycle of knowledge limitation is repeated at every level—elementary, secondary, and post-secondary—across generations.

The problem of literacy and literature knowledge. A second problem under the umbrella of limited knowledge is teachers' knowledge of literacy and literature. Teacher candidates becoming content area teachers for grades 7-12 typically have one literacy course, which they often resist taking. With new texts published each year, and media center specialists on the decline, schools and teachers cannot acquire the knowledge of the range of complex texts needed for the disciplines. Given the lack of professional development related to knowledge of materials (including digital) and their usage, content teachers have difficulty creating time for text exploration and reading within content classrooms.

The problem of knowledge about literacy strategies and tasks. A third problem of knowledge is related to the literacy tasks specified by the Common Core. This included the pedagogical knowledge teacher candidates miss in their university content courses referred to above, but more specifically, the strategies and methods required by the CCSS in respect to literacy learning in the content areas. In many cases, teacher preparation programs do not recognize the need for in-depth learning of the literacies of the content areas for those becoming secondary teachers. Methods for teaching complex texts are missing for most teachers and teacher candidates.

While the idea that *disciplinary literacy* is best developed in tandem with the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge is supported by the research (Pearson, 2010), this view is not commonly found in K-12 instruction or teacher preparation curriculums. For the most part, literacy instruction remains the responsibility of the English teacher, and is largely absent from content area instruction. Teachers have often had little opportunity to develop the disciplinary literacy lens required by the Common Core. Without the methods (strategies and curriculum) for addressing text complexity and literacy learning, classroom opportunities are missed. This lack of opportunity results then in an additional problem related to teacher knowledge, the problem of access.

The problem of access to knowledge. With the requirement for complex informational texts and shrinking budgets, schools have difficulty purchasing materials that

span reading levels as expected in the CCSS. Teachers may understand the need for knowledge of complex texts and strategies for literacy learning, but need professional development to acquire the knowledge of instructional methods for teaching the reading of complex texts. Again, we encounter an issue of implementation as we are faced with the question, who is responsible for making sure teachers have access to the necessary knowledge of complex tasks and disciplinary literacy strategies?

The problems court discussion. Discussion of the problem of teacher knowledge began with the topic of pedagogical and content knowledge. One participant cautioned that we should take care in implying that teachers lack knowledge or expertise. For many teachers in content areas it is difficult to understand how the Common Core even applies. This results in a pedagogy gap. Teachers just do not know how the expectations of the standards can be implemented instructionally.

Another point addressed in the discussion was the issue of developing a common language between literacy experts and disciplinary experts. Disciplinary experts do not understand the vocabulary and terminology of literacy instruction. Conversely, literacy experts find themselves challenged by the need to learn the language and literacies specific to many disciplines.

Often then, it is a problem of translation. One example of this can be found in the definition of the word text. Those in the field of literacy commonly understand that the word text refers to many types of representation, including video and visual texts, digital texts, music, and others. Through conversations with colleagues about the texts of their disciplines, we have found that text is often interpreted as print, but once the definition is explained and expanded, these disciplinary experts can provide many rich examples of non-print texts common to their field. Teachers today need this knowledge.

Findings

Through our analysis of the CCSS documents and the rich discussion of the Problems Court, we found that the disciplinary lens through which the standards present literacy has great promise for integrated teaching, resulting in relevance and critical thinking. However, differences between the expectations of the standards and the realities of schools present problems with implementation. Some of the issues identified were

- The structure of the CCSS is problematic.
 - Accountability for literacies of the disciplines is hidden in ELA/Reading standards.
 - The content disciplines integrated in K-5 ELA Standards assume a single teacher who can integrate literacy throughout the day, resulting in a lack of disciplinary focus in younger grades
 - EC-5 teachers are typically generalists who lack deep, specific disciplinary knowledge, yet they are counted upon to lay the foundation for reading disciplinary specific informational texts in the later grades.

- The mathematics standards are separate from the disciplines embedded in the ELA standards. This results in a lack of attention to the literacies of math.
- The CCSS were developed looking to the future, but there is no clear path to attain that future.
- There is a need to move schools toward a disciplinary model of teaching. It is time to redefine “every teacher a teacher of reading” by
 - identifying the literacies of the disciplines in a way that “fits” with content classes,
 - providing job embedded professional development for all teachers, and
 - expanding and effectively using common planning time to facilitate collaboration across disciplines.

In summary, we believe that the disciplinary focus of the CCSS is a move in the right direction and that the standards have great potential as the basis for reform in the teaching of literacy, in both the English and the content area classrooms. So what is our answer to “What’s wrong with the core?” The answer lies in unrealistic assumptions about the realities of schools, in the gap of transition time for teachers to analyze the requirements of the CCSS, and in the danger that lies in the public interpretation and implementation of the document. What we need is better understanding about the document as well as a restructuring of the document itself, so that we all do believe it takes more than one type of teacher to educate a child.

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Williams, A.R. and Koppenhaver, D.A. (2014). When scientifically-based instruction may not be: Employing theory to reinterpret student failure to respond to intervention. *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online]. Vol. 34.

**When Scientifically-Based Instruction May Not Be:
Employing Theory to Reinterpret Student Failure
to Respond to Intervention**

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Abstract

In this article, the limited progress of four students who participated in a pilot study of a phonics intervention is analyzed. The students, who had a diagnosis of Down syndrome and moderate to severe intellectual disabilities, received research-based instruction over a period of five weeks. After analyzing the scientific basis and fidelity of the intervention, a theory of reading development for beginning readers is explained as a way to understand the failure of the instruction. Finally, a three-step process for educators is proposed as a method for reducing potential errors in identifying students as non-responders and reducing instruction that is ill matched with students' needs.

When Scientifically-Based Instruction May Not Be: Employing Theory to Reinterpret Student Failure to Respond to Intervention

“You spelled the word, cat, Mark. We want the word, cap. What letter do you need to change in cat so that it spells cap? He wears a baseball cap.” Mark repeated both his word and the target word aloud and then carefully examined his word and the remaining letter cards. Finally he removed the -t and replaced it with a -p. He looked up and said, “Cap.”

“You’re right, Mark. You spelled the word, cap. Here’s the word card that spells cap, c-a-p. Just like yours. Let’s put cap in the pocket chart with the other three-letter words.”

Mark’s face changed from a look of concentration to that of celebration, and he cheered himself on with a self-congratulatory, “Woohoo! Gooooo Mark!”

Introduction

The lesson snapshot above is representative of classroom interactions throughout a five-week pilot study of a phonics intervention for students with significant intellectual disabilities. Students were highly engaged and made every attempt to do what the teacher requested. The teacher provided intensive feedback and guidance, and she held high expectations of success. Each day, Mark and three of his classmates met one-to-one with the first author for 20-minute sessions in which they engaged in systematic, guided, invented spelling with targeted letters and words. The curriculum, *Making Words* (Cunningham & Cunningham, 1992; Cunningham & Hall, 2007), was based on scientific research evidence (National Reading Panel, 2000). The instruction, implemented with fidelity, was scientifically-based (Cunningham & Cunningham, 2002).

Despite these factors that should have contributed to successful learning, student progress was negligible. Across multiple measures, results suggested students’ failure to increase awareness or use of letter-sound correspondences in decoding or spelling. For example, on a kindergarten spelling list, the four students represented 10 of 48 initial letter sounds logically or conventionally at pretest and eight of 48 at posttest (e.g., *watk* for *wish*). They represented eight medial or final letter sounds logically at pretest and 11 at posttest.

Perspectives

We found the above student outcome both surprising and troubling for two reasons. First, it played to an existing bias in the field regarding literacy instruction appropriate to students with a diagnosis of Down syndrome and moderate to severe intellectual disabilities. Predominant instructional materials and approaches are designed on the belief that such students cannot learn phonics and should be taught exclusively through sight word approaches (e.g., Browder & Spooner, 2006; Edmark, 2011; Oelwein, 1995). Methods textbooks identify students like Mark and his classmates as those “who

will not achieve the outcome of literacy," although they "can benefit from sight word instruction" (Browder, 2001, pp. 179-180).

Second, Mark and his classmates attended high school in a state adhering to the Common Core State Standards. In just a few years they are supposed to be reading at levels sufficient for college or career readiness, although at present they are best characterized as emergent readers. Mark and his classmates are soon to be engaged in higher-order thinking and rigorous content, although, despite the best efforts of schools for more than 10 years, they cannot currently spell words like *cap* without guidance and feedback.

As educators, we found that attributing the failure to Mark and his classmates provided an uncomfortable dead end. While it relieved us of responsibility for the students' failure to respond, it also failed to suggest directions for future interventions. The RTI model provided no guidance, since the tiers of instruction had been exhausted, and Mark and his classmates were already receiving special education services. We feared the self-fulfilling prophecy of assuming that students like Mark could not learn phonics. Clearly they would not if we ended phonics instruction and pursued a functional sight word approach (e.g., Browder & Spooner, 2006).

Failure has been defined in the business literature as "termination of an initiative that has fallen short of its goals" (McGrath, 1999, p. 14). Business leaders and scholars have learned to value failure for the learning opportunity it provides. Thoughtful analysis of failure resolves uncertainty and enables more systematic progress based on broader and deeper understanding, more thoughtful planning, and purposeful action (Shepherd, 2004). In fact, it is such analysis that leads to the concept of *intelligent failures*, those in which expectations are not met but something useful is derived (Sitkin, 1992).

The objective of this paper, then, is to turn this pilot study into an intelligent failure by sharing the process of reflection engaged in to understand the failure to improve decoding and spelling in adolescents with significant intellectual disabilities. The important contribution of theory will be addressed as a means of interpreting the results and redesigning the intervention.

Failure Analysis Methods

If we do not assume that the failure to learn is centered in the students, what remains is an assumption that the instruction we offered must be the source of the problem. How was that possible when we had selected scientifically-based instruction and implemented it diligently with fidelity? In order to answer this question, we began a thorough review of our preparations for the intervention study. First, we reviewed the literature to make sure the intervention was indeed evidence-based.

Review of the Intervention's Scientific Basis

We had selected *Making Words First Grade* (Cunningham & Hall, 2007) as the

intervention to be implemented, because we knew the students, while adolescents, were beginning readers. Making Words is described as a “guided invented spelling instructional strategy” (Cunningham & Cunningham, 1992, p. 107). It is organized on evidence-based practices in phonics that suggest explicit and systematic phonics instruction is superior to nonsystematic approaches, but that no specific approach fitting those criteria is superior to others (National Reading Panel, 2000; Stahl, Duffy-Hester, & Stahl, 1998). It employs evidence-based practices in phonemic awareness also, requiring students to blend and segment sounds and to do so by using letters, which increase the efficiency of acquisition of phoneme awareness and phonics (National Reading Panel, 2000).

Review of Fidelity of Implementation

Confident that the intervention was scientifically-based, we next reviewed our teaching procedures to make sure that we had implemented the intervention with fidelity. Each Making Words lesson consisted of three steps. First, in the guided invented spelling step, students were given a pre-determined set of six to eight letters of the alphabet and led in spelling 10-15 words of increasing length. Students were directed initially to form two-letter words and systematically guided through spelling increasingly longer words. For example, students with the letters *a, t, m, s, r,* and *h,* were told, “Take two letters and spell the word *at*. We are *at* school. *At*.” The students were then shown the word card and asked to compare their attempts to the model. If they were correct, they then put the word in a pocket chart. If they were incorrect, they self-corrected or were directed to self-correct (as in the vignette above) before putting the word in the pocket chart. Then they were directed, “Add one letter and spell *hat*. You have a baseball *hat*. *Hat*.” For each new word, the students were guided to add or change one letter or to rearrange the existing letters (e.g., rearrange *rat* to spell *art*).

Next, in a sorting step, the students were supported in identifying patterns in the words they had spelled. For example, they might sort the words they spelled into those that rhymed (e.g., *at, sat, hat, rat, mat* and *am, ram, ham, Sam*). In a final transfer step, students were directed to spell specific new words that shared patterns with the words they had previously sorted. That is, the intent was to teach them to generalize the use of patterns by comparison and contrast in order to read and spell unfamiliar words. The students might be given directions such as, “If this is how you spell *am, ram, ham,* and *Sam,* how do you think you could spell *bam? Jam?*” or “Which sorting pattern would help you spell *bam? Jam?*” Typically three to four new words were attempted in this way.

We found that our procedures were consistent with previous descriptions of the approach, directions in the front matter of the book, and sample scripted lessons (Cunningham & Cunningham, 1992; Cunningham & Hall, 2007).

Reviewing Theories of Reading Development

We identified an explanation of the failure of our scientifically-based intervention when we returned to the literature to explore theories of how students become beginning readers. We considered many models, but found that Morris and colleagues’ theory of

reading development (Morris, 1993; Morris, Bloodgood, Lomax, & Perney, 2003) provided the most specific implications for teaching and learning. It provided evidence that beginning reading understandings develop in a predictable order.

According to the model, knowledge of letter names (ABC) is the earliest developing understanding. As parents and educators sing the alphabet song and point out letters in books, children's names, and the environment, children acquire letter name knowledge in predictable ways (Justice, Pence, Bowles, & Wiggins, 2006). This knowledge of the alphabet leads children to attend to beginning consonant sounds (BC) in words, possibly because most letter names carry the sound they represent at the beginning (e.g., /b/, /k/, /t/) or ending (e.g., /f/, /m/, /r/) of the letter name (Foulin, 2005).

As children increase their knowledge of the alphabet and awareness of beginning consonant sounds, they are able to attend more specifically to print on the page when parents and teachers read aloud to them and point to words on the page. Children begin to attend to the spaces between words, and they develop concept of word (CW), an understanding that words are groups of letters on the page (Henderson, 1980). Additionally this growing attention to white space and understanding of beginning consonant sounds facilitates attention to the relationship of letters to sounds at the beginning and end of words (SPBE) (Morris, 1992, 1993).

These understandings, in turn, assist beginning readers in attending more fully to the letters and sounds within words (PS), and, as this understanding is firmed up through additional print experiences, to gain sight word knowledge (WORD) (Adams, 1990) and increase independence as beginning readers of text (READ).

Results: From Theory to Understanding

When we looked at Mark's skills and understandings, and those of his classmates, relative to the model, the problem became clear. Prior to the intervention, Mark was able to name 19 letters of the alphabet and 10 initial phonemes represented by pictures (e.g., seeing a picture of a ball and saying /b/). However, he was unable to apply that knowledge in spelling or segmenting words. He spelled words like *trap* as *HoKicike*, *wish* as *othewewei*, and *ship* as *Hatthew*. He was able to identify just four words from the *Qualitative Reading Inventory-3* (Leslie & Caldwell, 2000), and he had no strategies for reading or spelling words he had not memorized. He was able to read short texts composed of these memorized words, if they were accompanied by supportive illustrations (e.g., reading aloud "The boy is in the red car" beneath a picture accompanying this sentence).

If Morris and colleagues' (Morris, 1993; Morris, Bloodgood, Lomax, & Perney, 2003) theoretical model were conceptualized as a bookshelf, Mark and his classmates possessed bookend knowledge. They knew most letters of the alphabet and some sight words, but they had few strategies or understandings between those bookend skills. The students had little knowledge of letter-sound relations and seemed to understand concept

of word only in short, memorized texts. They were unable to look within words at letter-sound relationships, because they had little meaning to attach to abstract phoneme awareness and insufficient practice reading, writing, or listening to texts.

What we learned from our failure and the review process described above is that scientifically-based interventions in the absence of a theory of learning are insufficient. They are neither better nor worse than random selection of interventions, and they may be worse than eclectic instruction, which sometimes offsets the impact of poor instructional choices by providing a wide variety of learning experiences and opportunities. With instructional choices in classrooms increasingly restricted to the well-worn paths of evidence-based instruction, if the instruction does not match the needs of the students, then there are fewer opportunities to balance out the error during the instructional day.

Conceptualizing the theoretical model as a planning tool, we learned that the kind of intervention more likely to yield positive literacy outcomes for Mark and his classmates would look quite different than what we had provided. Our intervention emphasized guided invented spelling of two- to six-letter words along with sorting and transferring of rime patterns. It was too difficult given the students' existing understandings of print. A more successful intervention might have instead built on the letter-sound knowledge available in letter names already known to the students. Such an intervention might have emphasized invented spelling in writing along with reading of a greater variety of easy texts to promote student connection-making between concept of word and attending to letter-sound relationships in the beginning and final positions in words. A successful intervention might have provided greater opportunities to explore and apply letter-sound knowledge in reading and spelling new words.

Educational Importance: From Understanding to Application

The mistake we committed may be common in many classrooms that select evidence-based practices in hopes of assisting beginning readers in learning to read at supplemental tiers or in special education placements. The problem this causes is then placing students in Tier 2, Tier 3, or special education placements on the mistaken assumption that they did not respond to scientifically-based instruction. In fact, they might well have responded to scientifically-based instruction had it addressed their needs. A three-step process provides a solution to reducing the potential for such: use of the theoretical model of beginning reading, assessment referenced to that model, and selection of evidence-based practices that address the students' identified needs.

A larger question may be whether the goals of the Common Core are realistic for students with significant intellectual disabilities. At least one large-scale research and development project currently is exploring this question, the Dynamic Learning Maps at Kansas University (<http://dynamiclearningmaps.org/>). In an attempt to make the Common Core more relevant to and achievable by this population, project team members have identified essential elements of each standard, developed an alternative assessment, and

posted professional development materials online for teachers and administrators (<http://secure.dynamiclearningmaps.org/unc/facilitated/>).

Use of the Theoretical Model

Evidence-based practices answer the question of what to teach, but provide little guidance in the case of struggling readers or students in special education about whom, when, or why. RTI provides guidance for whom and when to modify instruction (i.e., those who fail to thrive at one or more tiers of instruction) but no explanation as to why. The theoretical model answers the neglected question of why. Educators or program directors, who begin with the theoretical model, will understand whom, what, when, and why to teach.

Assessment Referenced to the Theoretical Model

A diagnostic assessment that aligns directly with the model is the *Early Reading Screening Instrument* (ERSI; Morris, 1998). Originally designed as a tool for screening at-risk beginning readers for additional assistance, the ERSI requires approximately 20 minutes to administer individually. Students' relative performance on the sub-tests can be compared in order to answer the question, "What is preventing this student from progressing as a beginning reader?" The student's greatest needs can be identified and subsequently addressed more intensively and specifically than previous instruction or tiered interventions that may not have assisted that student in progressing satisfactorily. The ERSI has been demonstrated to be both valid and reliable for the use proposed here (Lombardino, Morris, Mercado, DeFillipo, Sariskey, & Montgomery, 1999; Morris, Bloodgood, Lomax, & Perney, 2003; Perney, Morris, & Carter, 1997).

ERSI materials, with additional directions and suggestions, can be found in Tyner (2004) or Lombardino, Morris, Mercado, DeFillipo, Sariskey, & Montgomery (1999). Copies of the two short texts used for finger-point reading, that include color photo illustrations instead of the original black-and-white line drawings, are available online: *Katie* (<http://tarheelreader.org/2009/02/11/katie/>) and *My Home* (<http://tarheelreader.org/2009/02/11/my-home/>).

Selection of Evidence-Based Instruction

Armed with knowledge of a theory of beginning reading and student performance data, teachers and schools are prepared to consider what kind of scientifically-based instruction will be most likely to address their students' needs at appropriate levels. One source of information about evidence-based practices in beginning reading is the What Works Clearinghouse (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>). Numerous additional sources can be found by Internet searches using terms like, "reading instruction best practices," "reading instruction that works," or "evidence-based reading instruction."

Intelligent Failure

We are hopeful that others can learn from our failure and gain a new appreciation of the role of theory in informing instructional decision-making. We are concerned that

schools may be selecting scientifically-based interventions without considering the match or mismatch to student needs. As we discovered, while many types of phonics instruction are scientifically-based, not all are equally appropriate. We are concerned that students may fail to respond, not because they cannot learn, but rather because the chosen instructional approach is not the best fit to their needs or existing skills and understandings. The resulting, and unnecessary, waste of increasingly scarce resources in response to failures incorrectly attributed to students would be unfortunate at best.

We are not suggesting that theory solves all instructional difficulties, and we recognize that there are a good many theories that might be considered in trying to develop more thoughtful approaches to student learning difficulties. It is important, however, that policy makers, school administrators, program coordinators, and teachers recognize that instruction cannot be considered high quality unless it addresses the needs of intended students at appropriate levels of support and challenge. Likewise, an intervention cannot be considered an intervention until and unless it addresses a student's needs. Assumptions of student literacy learning incapability will remain failures of instruction or program administration until and unless questions of the (mis)match of intervention and student needs are carefully considered.

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Wilson, N. S., Meyer, C.K., and Ramirez, L.A. (2014). Do the CCSS support developmentally responsive teaching of young adolescents? *American Reading Forum Annual Yearbook* [Online]. Vol. 34.

Do the CCSS Support Developmentally Responsive Teaching of Young Adolescents?

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Abstract

The adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has caused much debate across the nation. The arguments surrounding the standards range from the need for higher consistent standards across states to issues of states rights and developmental appropriateness. The CCSS comprise a portion of the curriculum in over 40 states across the nation, yet how do they align with the research-based characteristics of a good school? This article uses content analysis to analyze the CCSS for grades 6-8 with *This We Believe* (AMLE, 2010) the landmark position paper of the Association of Middle Level Education (AMLE), which describes the essential attributes for the education of young adolescents.

Do the CCSS Support Developmentally Responsive Teaching of Young Adolescents?

Academic standards describe what students should know and be able to achieve at particular points of time in their education. The delineation of skills and knowledge for students has led to disagreement and controversy. One side argues that standards level the playing field across schools, districts, and states (Finn & Greene, 2012). The argument on this side is that standards provide “specificity, clarity, and rich content to provide real guidance to curriculum designers, classroom teachers, test developers, and more” (Finn, 2012). Opponents of standards believe the standards are not rigorous enough, will be difficult to implement, politicize education (Finn, 2012), and negatively affect pedagogy and motivation (Kohn, 2010). When debating the standards, there is often confusion between the standards and the testing movement (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2008). However, despite your opinion of the standards, they play a huge role in our conversations about teaching, learning, and teacher preparation; thus, they need to be examined for fit within our existing research and frameworks regarding effective education.

The current battle over the standards focuses on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010) and their implementation in schools. The development of the ELA CCSS began in 2009, and they were released in 2010. According to the Core Standards website (CCSSO, 2010), the creation of the standards was informed by:

- The best state standards already in existence;
- The experience of teachers, content experts, states, and leading thinkers;
- Feedback from the public.

Today, the District of Columbia, 44 states, the Department of Defense, and four U.S. territories have all adopted the CCSS; although that number is decreasing as states repeal or review the adoption of CCSS (U.S. News & World Report, 2014). The CCSS are explicitly designed to guide teachers to implement a curriculum that will make students college and career ready.

The English Language Arts (ELA) standards incorporate both content and skills. The ELA CCSS mention specific types of texts such as myths, Shakespeare, foundational American literature, and America’s founding documents. Beyond these broad text suggestions, the decisions regarding content are theoretically left up to the state and local decision makers (CCSSO, 2010). The skills incorporated in the CCSS reflect a vision of “an active, engaged reader endowed with agency” (Pearson, 2013, p. 237). In short, the CCSS claim to describe desired student

outcomes at the end of each grade level, not descriptions of how teachers should teach (CCSSO, 2010, p. 6).

Like the standards movement in general, much controversy exists surrounding the CCSS. Some reasons for the controversy include a push for more non-fiction text, a focus on text complexity, and much more. The push back includes concerns regarding the process under which they were created, the nature of the assessments being developed, the connection to Race to the Top, and the recognition that standards alone cannot change achievement (Ravitch, 2014). Specifically, early childhood experts have decried the standards as developmentally inappropriate (Hiebert, 2011; Alliance for Childhood, 2010) due to the focus on complex text, unreasonable expectations, and narrowly focused curriculum intents.

Standards and Curriculum

How educators teach, the information being taught, and how schools are organized form the curriculum of a school. Standards are expected student outcomes. Curriculum, on the other hand, includes coherent goals and/or standards, strong teacher involvement, the making of classroom practice public, a strong parent-community network, a responsive student-centered learning climate, and leadership that builds collaboration among stakeholders where everyone is responsible for school improvement (Bryk, Bender, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Easton, 2010). In other words, standards are the end while curriculum is the means.

Despite the fact standards only make up a small portion of effective school curriculum, they have received a significant amount of public focus. The attention is the result of the effect standards can have on the broader curriculum. In fact, standards have the potential to affect students' -- particularly adolescents' -- constructions of meaning and interpretations of school (Ecles & Roeser, 2010). Therefore, it is important that educators examine the standards, in this case the English Language Arts CCSS, to determine if they are coherent with the broader curricular needs of young adolescents. For the purpose of this study, we specifically examined the middle grades, 6-8, standards and their alignment with developmentally appropriate middle grades practice.

Developmentally Appropriate Middle Grades Practice

This We Believe (TWB) is the landmark position paper from the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) in which the association's vision for successful schools for young adolescents (ages 10-15) is delineated in 16 characteristics based on research and empirical evidence. Since the 1960s, when the middle school movement gained momentum, research has confirmed these 16 characteristics as essential to the academic achievement and personal development of young adolescents. Written initially in 1982 by National Middle School Association (now AMLE) committee members, it is in its 4th edition and has research supplements

which accompany it. Middle level educators view TWB as the seminal paper of the national association, one that has stood the test of time, and as a key resource to those who believe in and are committed to developing the most effective schools for young adolescents.

TWB sets forth 16 characteristics of effective education for young adolescents which fall into three larger categories: curriculum, instruction, and assessment; leadership and organization; and culture and community. The characteristics listed in TWB (AMLE, 2010) describe a middle school curriculum intended to be broad and exploratory in nature while allowing young adolescents to a gain deeper understanding of the world in which they live (Eichhorn, 1966; Lounsbury, 1984).

The text is divided into four essential attributes of middle level education and sixteen more specific characteristics. While the text takes a holistic view of school, the four essential attributes specify that education for young adolescents must be: a) developmentally responsive, b) challenging, c) empowering, and d) equitable. The characteristics further break down successful schools for young adolescents as those that examine the curriculum, instruction, assessment, leadership, organization, culture, and community to meet the attributes.

We recognize, as middle level educators, covering the content through standards and learning/mastering the content are not synonymous. In fact, Musoleno and White (2010) found instructional practices may have been compromised by the standards movement and the inevitable focus on testing which has accompanied it. As such, we believe that an analysis of the ELA standards and their relationship to TWB is essential in determining the appropriateness of the standards.

TWB describes curriculum as the “primary vehicle for achieving the goals and objectives of a school” (AMLE, 2010, p. 17). In fact, AMLE describes an effective curriculum as one that is *challenging, exploratory, integrative, and relevant* while being developmentally responsive to young adolescents. A challenging curriculum is described as one that has rigorous concepts and tasks that are individualized, diversified, and perceived as achievable by students. TWB says an exploratory curriculum provides opportunities for students to explore a variety of disciplines through student directed learning, choice, and collaboration. An integrative curriculum is interdisciplinary, centered around students questions, and encourages students to create and develop knowledge. The final facet of curriculum as described by TWB is relevant; a relevant curriculum focuses on real-life/authentic problems and the creation of new student interests.

Methodology

Since the purpose of this study is to analyze the ELA component of the CCSS, we opted to conduct a content analysis (CA), which Neuendorf (2002) defines as “the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics.” Crowley and Delfico (1996) assert CA can be used to describe the “attitudes or perceptions of the author” (p. 8) of a document, in this case, the CCSS. We contend a content analysis of the ELA CCSS would provide us with a better idea as to whether the writers of the standards shared the same definition of curriculum as TWB.

The CA was a multistage process. First, categories were determined using AMLE’s description of a developmentally responsive curriculum (see Figure 1). The categories were made up of the key words used by TWB to describe the four key areas of curriculum: challenging, exploratory, integrated, and relevant.

Challenging	Rigorous concepts Student personal responsibility and control Student learning tasks perceived as achievable Diversified learning tasks Individualized learning tasks
Exploratory	Performance based Student directed learning Collaboration between student and teacher Collaboration between students Allowing for student choice
Integrative	Centered around important questions Reflection on experiences Interdisciplinary Students as knowledge producers
Relevant	Focus on real-life, authentic problems Student generated questions Create new interests Application of digital tools

Figure 1: Initial Codebook - based on characteristics for an effective curriculum as defined by This We Believe (2010)

Then, a careful reading of the standards was conducted to determine the unit of analysis. The unit of analysis describes exactly what is being studied. In this situation we needed to determine if we were studying isolated words and phrases or entire standards and sentences. We concluded the words or phrase alone would obfuscate the larger meaning of the text; therefore, we opted to code complete standards and/or sentences. Next, we questioned whether a single unit of analysis could represent more than one category. As we reviewed the standards and the categories, the complex interrelated nature of the standards themselves led us to

decide that multiple codes may be applicable to a single sentence and/or standard. Although this did make the co-coded standards and phrases less precise, it does reflect the multifaceted nature of CCSS.

Next we determined what should be included in the analysis. We decided we should analyze the introduction, the ELA standards, the History/Social Studies and Science literacy standards (grades 6-8), the technical subjects standards, as well as the appendices. This determination was made as our purpose was to look at the ELA CCSS as a whole and the entirety of the ELA standards include all of the areas described above.

Once the discussions and decisions regarding how to conduct the CA were complete, coding began. We began analyzing the standards using the TWB's essential characteristics for effective curriculum (Table 1). Each researcher coded a third of the standards. After coding, we met to determine the effectiveness of the initial code book. We quickly began to see that not all were a "fit." As we read, re-read, coded, discussed, and recoded the standards for middle level ELA, we made adjustments to the codes, adding some and omitting others. We reached consensus prior to making adaptations to the codes.

During the next stage, we created the second code book. We opted to remove or edit codes, as they could not be established within the confines of the CCSS. For example, our initial coding found nearly all the standards could be viewed as *rigorous*. Thus we determined a need for specificity and added five sub-codes. To determine those sub-codes, we examined what made each standard rigorous in relation to TWB which maintains the curriculum is rigorous when "students grapple with and master advanced concepts and skills" (p. 18). Since the task of analysis requires students to wrestle with information, we determined standards asking students to analyze would be considered *rigorous*. Likewise, we added sub-codes to codes such as *students as knowledge producers*, specifying the various types of knowledge the standards ask students to produce. *Student generated ideas* code also required sub-codes to differentiate what types of ideas students might be *generating*—*questions, theories, organizational tools*. These additional codes allowed for a more precise analysis with identifiable differences between standards. Other codes were added as an antithesis to an initial code. We added codes for *non-exploratory* and *non-relevant* to counter the codes of *exploratory* and *relevant*. These codes allowed us to code data that we saw were contradictions to the principles of TWB.

Just as some codes needed to be added, others needed to be omitted. In our coding and subsequent discussion, we realized some of the initial codes were indeterminable. For example, codes under the heading *relevant* were difficult to determine because we, as researchers, can simply not ascertain relevancy for individual students. Nor can we say whether or not a particular standard might

create new interests in students. Other codes rely heavily on context, making them difficult to connect to specific standards; *focus on real-life, authentic problems*, and *centered around important questions* are examples of codes we deleted because of inability to determine based on the standards.

Other codes from TWB were unable to be aligned to the CCSS and were omitted because they relied so heavily on implementation. Codes in the *exploratory* category were particularly difficult to align. Codes such as *collaboration between students*, *collaboration between student and teacher*, *student directed learning*, and *allowing for student choice* were all impossible to assign to the CCSS in its written form. We might see these in classroom observations, but cannot assume they are present based solely on the standards themselves. Similarly, *individualized learning tasks*, *diversified learning tasks*, and *student learning tasks perceived as achievable* can simply not be aligned without more information about context and implementation.

After establishing the second code book (see Figure 2), we each reviewed 5% of the ELA CCSS before engaging in a new discussion of the codebook. The final discussion focused on the category of *exploratory* which we then removed. AMLE's definition of *exploratory* is linked to the exploration of different content areas or experiences, not a style of instruction. When removing this category, we were left with items identified as *performance based*. We determined the sub-category of *performance based* was applicable to the main category of *challenging*. Performance based describes how the ELA CCSS could be implemented or assigned to students and described a challenging way to do so.

Challenging	Rigorous concepts Analyze purpose Analysis overtime Analysis of two or more ideas in one text Analyze relationships in more than one text (compare and contrast) Analysis of language Student personal responsibility and control
Exploratory	Performance based (subjective, rubric needed, range of performances)
Non-exploratory	Objective based (not linked to comprehension or collaboration, something you could check off as right or wrong, easily assessed) Independent
Integrative	Students as knowledge producers Generate summary Generate an explanation Generate synthesis Generate argument
Relevant	Student generated ideas Questions Organizational tools Theories Application of digital tools
Non-relevant	Digital tools used for skill and drill

Figure 2: Second Codebook - based on characteristics for an effective curriculum as defined by *This We Believe* (2010)

This third and final revision led to the final code book (see Figure 3). These codes were checked and finalized by each researcher reviewing the 5% of the ELA CCSS and discussing coding reliability. This discussion led to inter-rater reliability with the final code book of 96%. Therefore, the final code book was established and determined sufficient for content analysis.

Challenging	Rigorous concepts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze purpose Analysis overtime Analysis of two or more ideas in one text Analyze relationships in more than one text (compare and contrast) Analysis of language Student personal responsibility and control Performance based (subjective, rubric needed, range of performances)
Non-exploratory	Objective based (not linked to comprehension or collaboration, something you could check off as right or wrong, easily assessed) Independent
Integrative	Students as knowledge producers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generate summary Generate an explanation Generate synthesis Generate argument
Relevant	Student generated ideas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Questions Organizational tools Theories Application of digital tools
Non-relevant	Digital tools used for skill and drill

Figure 3: Final Codebook - based on characteristics for an effective curriculum as defined by *This We Believe* (2010)

Findings

Our first finding came not from the data analysis, but from the in-depth process of developing the code book. There are simply some characteristics of *This We Believe* and middle level curricular philosophy that cannot be measured with the CCSS. For instance, an exploratory curriculum cannot be determined using the ELA CCSS. To be clear, we are not saying that the CCSS does not always align with middle level philosophy; rather, we simply cannot determine the alignment of some standards because of the reliance on implementation by individual teachers with unique strengths, weaknesses, areas of expertise, and teaching styles. Nor can we account for school resources, student characteristics, and other unknowns, which may influence the alignment of the CCSS with TWB. Thus, the findings below reflect how the ELA CCSS align partially with TWB's definition of a developmentally appropriate curriculum.

Overall Findings

The overall findings (see Figure 4) illustrate that the standards meet the criteria for *challenging*. However, the other criteria of a developmentally appropriate curriculum for middle school were not identified as central to the CCSS. In fact, 3% of the standards were identified as *non-relevant* and not meeting the description of developmentally appropriate curriculum.

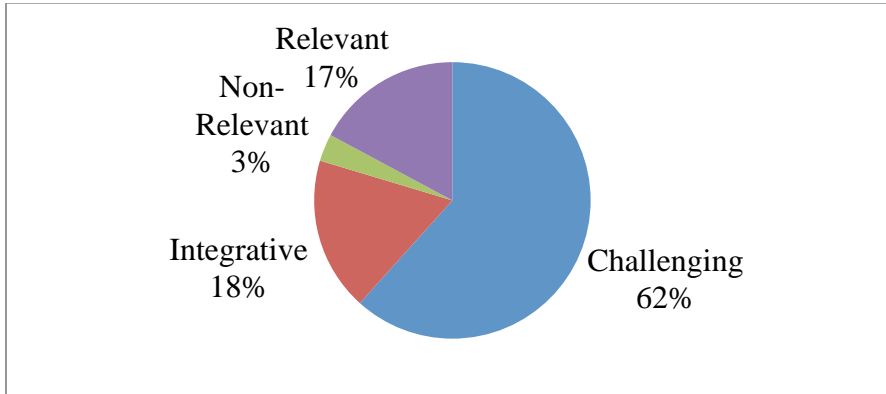


Figure 4: Pie chart showing the characteristics of the English Language Arts CCSS according to aspects of *TWB's curriculum description*.

Challenging

The preponderance (62%) of codes was identified as *challenging*. The task of analysis in general was the most predominant code (44%) with the *analysis of language* and *analysis of relationships in more than one text* receiving the bulk of the codes with 13% each. Examples of *analyzing relationships in more than one text* include:

Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.8.7)

Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.8)

When the standards ask students to analyze language they are asking them to do tasks such as

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.6.4)

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.4)

Use appropriate and varied transitions to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts. (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.2.C).

These types of tasks, because they are analytical in nature and ask students to delve into ELA content at a deeper level, were determined to be *challenging*, one of TWB's four major attributes of effective education for young adolescents. Specifically, TWB views challenging tasks as those that ensure every student learns and that expectations are high for all learners. The examples above, involving analysis of relationships and language, challenge students to interact with texts in ways that require higher order thinking skills and move students beyond superficial or passive reading and viewing.

Since most of the analysis tasks ask that students demonstrate or perform, there was a co-occurrence with many of these codes. For instance over 50% of the *analysis of two or more texts* codes asked students to perform a task, so were labeled *performance based*,

...students need to be able to gain knowledge from challenging texts that often make extensive use of elaborate diagrams and data to convey information and illustrate concepts (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.Introduction).

Students need to first analyze two texts before conveying information. The high incidence of co-occurrences indicated students' performance on the standards required they combine skills to demonstrate proficiency.

We identified a predominance of the standards as challenging--62%. Many of the standards required students to analyze information across different texts and/or asked to students to synthesize information. These tasks often require students to demonstrate their knowledge through written or spoken artifacts thus making the ELA CCSS *challenging*.

Integrative

TWB (2010) purports that one factor of integrative curriculum is when students have the opportunity to generate their own questions and then to "produce or construct knowledge rather than simply being consumers of information" (p. 21). There were significantly fewer codes identifying units of the ELA CCSS as *integrative*. However, of the 18% of units identified as integrative, the predominance were described as *students as knowledge producers*. An example of one such code is

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.7.2).

Notice how this standard asks students to convey knowledge they have built through research. Rather than simply asking students to analyze provided information, standards coded as *integrative* require students to formulate their own texts using an array of knowledge and skills.

Relevant

TWB describes a relevant curriculum as one that “allows students to pursue answers to questions they have about themselves, the content and the world” (2010, p. 22). In the CCSS, students are asked to generate ideas when they conduct research and draw evidence from text. One piece of evidence that illustrates this is

Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.2.C)

When students choose examples and facts, they are building personal answers to the questions that they are researching. Since students are determining which facts and examples to use, the research process becomes more personal and *relevant* because the students are answering their own questions.

Overall, the findings indicate that the standards are challenging. They also present opportunities for relevant and integrative teaching. However, the standards alone do not provide what is needed to create a developmentally appropriate curriculum.

Discussion

From our content analysis, we believe the CCSS have the potential to align with the characteristics of an effective middle level curriculum as outlined in TWB. However, since the CCSS are standards and not a curriculum, the challenge lies with the implementation of the standards. While the CCSS for middle school align relatively well, noticeable gaps exist between TWB and the CCSS ELA middle level standards. Most of these gaps occur because the standards are goals; they do not dictate how schools and teachers instruct students. Unfortunately, as we noted earlier, standards and high stakes testing often go hand-in-hand. As such, we are concerned that administrators (both state- and local-level) lose sight of the forest because of the trees. In other words, the implementation of the CCSS becomes prescribed during implementation because of the pressure of the assessments. We, in fact, through discussion with teachers, have heard firsthand stories of CCSS texts and lessons being adopted with little or no teacher input and without the learner in mind.

We suggest school systems take a different approach. Educators of all levels need to remember the CCSS is not a curriculum but simply a set of standards. We believe middle-level teachers must have the freedom to develop instruction, which builds upon both the CCSS ELA standards and the characteristics of effective curriculum as outlined in TWB. A top-down implementation of the CCSS may cause problems because, without the firsthand knowledge of the young adolescent learners in a teachers' classroom, the instruction is not likely to align with TWB.

Conclusion

Mention the CCSS in conversation and a lively debate is likely to ensue. The CCSS elicits strong feelings for many reasons, many of which are not even related to education but are driven by political forces and business stakeholders. The purpose of this study was to step away from the heated debate and analyze the CCSS to determine how well the standards align with AMLE's essential attributes of effective instruction for young adolescents. Through the content analysis of the standards, we found the CCSS have the potential to align with TWB; however, much of the alignment between the two hinges on the instructional approaches and curriculum implemented in schools. Administrators and educators should view the CCSS as the end goal. We encourage middle-level educators to draw upon AMLE's essential attributes and work with administrators to develop a curriculum that meets the learning needs of young adolescents. We also encourage all stakeholders to attempt to parse the intertwined relationship between the CCSS, commercial curriculum, and high-stakes testing. While the three are not mutually exclusive, we feel viewing the CCSS as its own entity has value and can benefit students in the long run and can support developmentally appropriate teaching.

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