

5-2013

The Relationship Between the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards and 21st Century Learning Skills

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<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2013.edu.07>

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Horky, Sarah Christine, "The Relationship Between the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards and 21st Century Learning Skills" (2013). *Graduate Master's Theses, Capstones, and Culminating Projects*. 95.
<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2013.edu.07>

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Title Page

The Relationship Between the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards and
21st Century Learning Skills

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education

School of Education and Counseling Psychology

Dominican University of California

San Rafael, CA

April 2013

Acknowledgements

I would briefly like to thank my professors Dr. Madalienne Peters, Dr. Sarah Zykanov, Carol Lusk and Carolee Friedman for bringing such guidance and confidence to my transition into teaching and ultimately my master's thesis.

I would also like to thank my fellow colleagues in the master's program as well as my colleagues in the teaching credential program at Dominican University of California. I graciously thank Amy Fadeji and Lindsey Coye, my directing teachers during my students teaching assignment and substitute teaching classes, have been instrumental in discussing the common core standards and the subsequent realities of implementing those standards in their respective classrooms.

Finally, last but not least I would like to say a million thanks to my husband, Robert and son, Christoph. They have supported me 100% through my career change and subsequent master's program. Without them I do not know where I would be. I also would like to acknowledge my parents and close friends for their support and feedback regarding education and the current path our country is taking regarding education.

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After working through the strands of the CCSS many of the experts agreed that it is a village mentality approach as we run through the CCSS. Ms. T stated that, “each year the CCSS strands builds upon itself. It pushes aside the concept that specific teachings within each grade level will not to be touched again until it appears in a upper grade level State Standards”. Due its refocus, each teacher will feel that both the upper and lower grade teachers are incorporating the new standards into their curriculum. Not only does this take the pressure off the individual teacher to touch on the standard it puts relevance into teaching through the CCSS as it will be touched on again and taught the next year and so on. The integration of 21st century learning skills will be wrapped in the focus of the CCSS and will be taught throughout all levels of education. 28

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Abstract

The reception, by the educational community, of the imminent implementation of the Common Core State Standards in the elementary school classroom has been received with cautious fanfare. What will be the steps for implementation of the Common Core State Standards in the elementary school? How will the implementation of the Common Core State Standards across the United States create students with four areas of focus: life skills, learning skills, core subject themes and IT skill set aka 21st Century learning skills?

Critics of the adoption of the Common Core State Standards fear the schools will focus primarily on reading and mathematics and traditional assessments. For the states that have met their educational benchmarks, the other aspects of a well-rounded learning based curriculum and its subsequent enrichment will be neglected.

The purpose of the study is to explore the implementation of Common Core State Standards as a positive factor for teachers and students and will the CCSS in fact help the elementary students and the reach the goals relating to their 21st century learning skills set out by the state and federal education czars to prepare the students for success as they enter high school, college and their future careers. Findings indicate that the conceptualization of the standards as they apply to classroom implementation and the assessment of these broad ideas is ambiguous, to say the least.

Chapter 1 Introduction

We need to prepare children to be able to learn, not just teach them how to take a test. Currently in the United States, it is evident we are teaching children how to take standardized tests which will ultimately measure their success and their future endeavors. With the advent of 21st century learning skills teachers are expected to move away from the traditional methods of teaching and bring into the classroom new and innovating approaches to teach the content and lifelong skills. By wrapping this new skill set into the framework of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) we are expecting students to step out of their comfort zone and learn differently.

While visiting family in Vienna, Austria and pursuing this current venture into education I have been involved in great discussions regarding the differences between the primary educations in America vs. primary education in Europe. Most recently, we have discussed moving to Vienna for a few years to be close to family and to expose our son to the language and culture in Austria. The education system in Austria is based upon a Nationalized Standards that have many similarities to our adoption of Common Core State Standards. Their education system has been systematically set up to give all children an opportunity to be taught critical thinking skills and “college readiness.” At the elementary level all of the students are taught the exact same standards based curriculum. It does not matter where you live in the country or your socio-economic background. Once the children reach middle school assessments are given to each child, which then determine different programs by which they can study. Choices include entering a university program or a vocational/ apprenticeship program with continued schooling in relation to the area of work.

After finishing my credential program and speaking with teaching professionals in Austria I began to question what the US was planning on doing to address National Standards.

Currently, each state has a different focus as to what the needed graduation requirements may be. The labyrinth of our education system, starting in elementary school, is overwhelming.

Statement of Problem

The CCSS are being touted as the answer to preparing our students for successful ventures for further education and eventually their future careers. How will the “CCSS” be translated into classroom practice? How will student learning be assessed under this new conceptual model?

Research Questions

How can the adoption of Common Core State Standards in our schools prepare students for success in their secondary education? Will the implementation of the CCSS in the elementary school create 21st century skill learners? How much influence have other countries’ own National Standards had upon our adoption of the CCSS and what is the correlation for success?

Theoretical Rationale

Historically, education standards have been decided by each state. With the acceptance of a National Standards based Curriculum known as the “CCSS” the educational system will be able to teach 21st century skills across the country successfully. Due to the perceived failure of the current educational systems inability to prepare students to be college and “career ready” sparked two organizations working with state education leaders to create the CCSS. With the adoption of the CCSS, and the need to address career ready skills much has been linked between the adoption of CCSS and the teaching of 21st century learning skills. The 21st century learning environments are guided by standards, but require curricula and assessment systems that allow students to think creatively and to be able to collaborate. By adopting the CCSS educators will

be expected to design curriculum and assessments that will emphasize authentic real world problems. It will engage students in inquiry and exploration and provide opportunities for students to apply what they know in meaningful ways. The focus of the “CCSS” is its ability to address higher order thinking skills and integrate it into National standards for the first time. These 21st Century skills such as listening, comprehension and understanding are implied and interwoven throughout the CCSS. They focus on what is most essential and thus represents a great place to start educating our youth.

In California, there has been great emphasis on expecting the teachers to be teaching to the California framework. Many contrarians feel that the California Common Core State Standards (CCCCSS) will be creating a “one size fits all” standard for all teachers and schools. Their fear is that it will take away from the creativity and individualism that teachers use to go beyond teaching to a standardized test. Yet, the argument for the adoption of the Common Core State Standards is that they interweave 21st century skills into the curriculum to better preparing our students for their future.

Background and Need

Education is primarily a state and local responsibility within the United States. It is individual states and local communities, as well as public and private organizations of all kinds, that establish schools and colleges, develop curricula, and determine requirements for enrollment and graduation. The structure of education finance in America reflects this predominant State and local role. Dating back to 1867, the Department of Education was created to collect information on schools and teaching that would help the States establish effective school systems (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, para 4).

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The standards were developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts, to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce (EPIC, 2013).

The standards are based upon effective models from states across the US and countries around the world. The “CCSS” will provide parents and teachers with a common understanding of what students are expected to learn. By creating consistent standards this will provide consistent benchmarks no matter where the student may live throughout the United States (EPIC, 2013).

In general, standards define the skill set and knowledge that students should have within their educational careers, culminating with graduating high school and being able to succeed in entry-level academic college courses and/or in workforce training or vocational programs. Standards are aligned with college and work expectations and are clear, understandable and consistent for both students and their teachers. The “CCSS” includes difficult content and its application of knowledge through high-order skills. The “CCSS” will build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards/frameworks. In keeping with its success, the standards are aligned with other top performing countries to prepare our students to succeed in our global economy and society (U.S. Department of Education, 2012 para. 8).

Over the past 10 years, there has been a growing appreciation for the importance of skills other than the cognitive skills typically tested by standardized tests. The concept of 21st century skills does not have a precise definition, but is intended to convey the idea that changes in technology and culture are leading to changing demands in the workplace, and so the skills that

are required in today's and the future workplace are different from those required in the past (Levy & Murnane, 2004).

One way the demands will be different is that there may be a greater emphasis on interpersonal, social, communicative, and intrapersonal, self-regulatory skills, as well as broad cognitive skills (Kyllonen, 2012). If the requirements of the 21st century workplace are changing, there may be increased pressures on the educational system to produce the skills that are emerging as a necessary component of a successful education.

Social- emotional learning (SEL), which has come to stand for in- and out-of-school programs that develop “core competencies to recognize and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, appreciate the perspectives of others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle interpersonal situations constructively” (Haskins, Murnane, Sawhill & Snow, 2012) is one response to this demand. There are additional responses also that state the 21st century skills concept encompasses a broad spectrum of skills, perspectives, capabilities, and competencies that undoubtedly will evolve further with continued changes in technology and culture. “To be productive contributors to society in our 21st century, one needs to quickly learn the core content of a field of knowledge while also mastering a broad portfolio of essentials in learning, innovation, technology, and careers skills needed for work and life” (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Federal Mandates

At the beginning of the 21st century there was a strong action taken at the federal level to bring standardized education to all children in the United States. The first real national expectation came in the form of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which specified what states *had to* do regarding raising student achievement and improving the quality of teaching. Currently the

future of the NCLB has an unknown future yet it highlighted the need for national education standards. The NCLB has created a desire to intertwine national standards within the United States but it also has created detractors who want to continue education decisions occurring within each state (Bracey, 2009).

President Bush first set the education agenda when, in 1989, he convened the nation's governors at an education summit in Charlottesville, Va. Emerging from this conference was a set of national goals to be reached by 2000 — thus marking an era of collaboration.

During the Clinton administration, the Goals 2000 legislation was the next foray into national standards. In 1994, the National Education Standards and Assessment Council was authorized, as recommended in the National Council on Education Standards and Tests report, but never established. Again, much debate and controversy ensued (Brandt, 2012).

Also in 1994, amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 required states to establish content standards, tests to measure student achievement in these standards, and performance standards. Standards were still popular, and federal involvement was acceptable — but only as far as saying what had to happen in the states, rather than in some national or federal entity (Brandt, 2012).

Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Introduction

This section addresses literature that has been published regarding the Common Core State Standards and its adoption and implementation into schools across the United States over the last couple of years. Much of the literature links itself between the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the successful teaching of 21st century learning skills within the current student population.

The literature explains the process of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards into the various school districts across the United States. Authors Kobe and Renter documented successes and challenges with its initial implementation of CCSS over the last two years (Kobe, Rentners & Center on Education Policy, 2011). The literature also discusses the link between the CCSS framework and 21st century learning skills. With their linkage comes a theory that successful assessment of these CCSS and the learning skills will create successful, future leaders (McLeod, 2010).

Examining what successful implementation of CCSS looks like, a strong support structure from the administrators, faculty and community is important in the connection to the school (Meeder, 2012). As information relating to the “CCSS” becomes available to help teachers understand their roles there has been a greater support for the CCSS in schools nationwide (Kober, Rentner and Center on Education Policy, 2012). Beginning with its next phase, implementation and assessment, the standards face it’s biggest challenge yet, translation from expectation on paper to instruction in the classroom. While educators are promoting radical change in creating a coherent national framework for what students should know and the way they learn, we have not yet committed to offering teachers the deep learning they will need to

transform the way they work (Gewertz, 2012a). As will any initiative, there are critics who are skeptics and opposed to the “CCSS”. As Tienken states, the “CCSS” will become another overburdened initiative that will be too difficult to implement across all elementary schools in the United States (Tienken, 2011).

Historical Context

In 1996, a bi-partisan organization was created to raise academic standards, graduation requirements, improve assessments, and strengthen accountability in all 50 states. The initial motivation for the development of the Common Core State Standards was part of the American Diploma Project (ADP) (Barton, 2010). By 2004, Eighty-seven percent of K-12 students in the U.S. live in states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards. Though this widespread approval is no small feat in a country that has long resisted national learning standards, the Common Core State Standards cannot truly be called a success until the standards are effectively implemented (Barton, 2010).

States are concerned about the rigor of the Common Core State Standards and the relationship between this new system of standards and existing standards, particularly at the exit level from high school. The Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC), therefore, designed and conducted the current study to determine the extent of correspondence (alignment) between the exit level Common Core State Standards and each of five sets of existing standards. The sets of standards were selected because they were either identified as exemplary state standards, were explicitly written at the college readiness level, or represented a rigorous instructional program focused on college readiness. The purpose was to see if the Common Core State Standards

covered similar content; if so, how broadly they covered the comparison standards; and whether the cognitive challenge level of aligned content was comparable (Bomer, 2011).

Implementation and testing is at a root of issues amongst state and local leaders within the education community. Like No Child Left Behind, interpretation and statistical implementation can be the cause many issues as to how we gauge the success of teaching 21st century learning skills to our students. Long gone is the pencil and paper testing linked directly to the specific standards based curriculum (Camins, 2011).

Measuring 21st Century Learning Skills

As Common Core State Standards are implemented into the classroom, much of the literature discusses how assessments relating to 21st century skills may require different approaches from those that have dominated assessment systems previously. For example, multiple-choice; short, constructed-response; or essay tests may not prove sufficient for measuring many of the 21st century skills, such as the interpersonal skills of teamwork, collaboration, leadership, and communication, or some of the hard to measure cognitive skills, such as creativity, or some of the intrapersonal skills, such as self-regulation, time management, and adaptability.

It may be that some of the reluctance apparent in the failure of current standards efforts to embrace 21st century skills education goals reflects distrust in the capability of current educational measurement science to measure such skills in a reliable and valid way. And it may be that future adoption will depend on the field's ability to develop creative and innovative solutions to the problem of measuring 21st century skills (Kyllonen, 2012). Kyllonen believes that educators and employers claim 21st century skills are important for the schools to develop, and for students to master in order to be successful in the 21st century workplace. It is also clear that studies show that 21st century skills are as important, and in some cases more important for

success than the content skills that are the focus of much current attention in large-scale standardized assessment testing (Kyllonen, 2012).

21st Century Skills interwoven within CCSS

A review of various sources identifying 21st century skills suggests that there are common themes running through the Common Core State Standards. A framework adopted in several publications by the NRC and NAS provide a good basis of review. The framework suggests that 21st century skills can be organized into the areas of cognitive skills (e.g., critical thinking, problem solving, creativity), interpersonal skills (communication skills, social skills, teamwork, cultural sensitivity, dealing with adversity), and intrapersonal skills (self management, self regulation, time management, self development, lifelong learning, adaptability, executive functioning (Barnett, 2010).

Furthermore, 21st century skills can serve as student learning outcomes, curriculum can be built around developing them, teacher professional development can emphasize this type of instruction, and various learning environments could be developed to promote them. Common Core State Standards assessment methods will have to be increasingly challenged as to the type of assessments will prove to be difficult to create. How do we create assessments of hard-to-measure skills such as teamwork, and communication skills? Yet there are performance measures for some of the 21st century skills, such as collaborative problem solving, and creativity, and developments in these areas are likely to prove increasingly important in the short- and medium term, as users demand more objective measures of these very important skills.

21st Century Learning Skills and CCSS Create Successful Students

Yet McLeod states other educators and administrators believe a quality 21st century education prepares students to be successful, contributing citizens in the context of today's global society. Success in the 21st century requires students to understand how to learn independently. It is necessary to develop strong critical thinking and interpersonal communication skills, both written and oral, in order to be successful in an increasingly fluid, interconnected, and complex world. 21st century skills learned through our curriculum will become increasingly more interdisciplinary, integrated, project-based and technology enhanced. Instruction will focus on the development and use of skills such as critical thinking and problem solving, written and oral communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation. 21st century learning builds upon such past conceptions of learning as "core knowledge in subject areas" and recasts them for today's world and today's learners where a global perspective and collaboration are critical skills (McLeod, 2010).

The standards emphasize nonfiction reading as well as writing across disciplines and clear analysis based on evidence from demanding texts—skills students' need to success in college and the workplace. At the heart of the LDC materials are broadly applicable "template tasks." These templates allow teachers to create classroom assignments that incorporate the literacy standards, regardless of the specific subject area they teach, the curriculum being used, or the teacher's instructional style (Rothman, 2011). Yet getting from standards on paper to the deep changes required in practice will be a significant challenge.

Statistical Information

In 2004, a survey was sponsored by the department of education asking more than 400 U.S. employers across a range of sectors included items asking employers how important various “applied” and “content” skills were for incoming employees, either those entering with a high school or a 2-year or 4-year college degree (Barton, 2010). The results from the findings state there are two useful conclusions to be drawn. First, some of what they called *applied skills*, or what might be referred to as 21st century skills—specifically, oral and written communication, teamwork and collaboration, professionalism and work ethic, and critical thinking and problem solving—were rated “very important” for college graduates by over 90% of the employers. Second, this pattern was true for both college and high school graduates, although for high school graduates, the percentages were a bit lower across the board, and, interestingly, the skill receiving the highest number of “very important” ratings was relating to work ethic (Phillips & Wong, 2012).

The National Research Council (NRC) and National Academy of Sciences (NAS) have conducted several studies of 21st century skills over the past several years, beginning in 2005 with workshops convened to discuss the role of K-12 education in developing 21st century skills, following up with workshops on the role of 21st century skills in science education, one focusing specifically on assessment issues and then a recent effort on deeper learning and 21st century skills. Over the course of the workshops, a vast organization of 21st century skills has proven to serve as a useful organizational framework (Tienken, 2012).

The emergence of the new Common Core State Standards presents an opportunity to re-examine the current system of educational assessments and address their deficiencies (McTighe, & Wiggins, 2010). The effect of high stakes assessments has resulted in many school districts shifting focus from resource rich curriculum and best practice instruction to a focus on what is

tested, thus diminishing the standards and subject areas that are not assessed. In many instances, this has led to the narrowing of curriculum and in-depth instruction necessary for meaningful student learning. In addition, the broad scope of many state-learning standards has caused teachers to quickly “cover” massive amounts of material rather than utilizing in-depth instructional strategies that spend adequate time and resources necessary to uncover content. This testing indicates that it would require 400 school days to effectively teach the content found in a single year’s worth of current state standards. It is important for a school system to identify the skills and content critical for students to acquire yearly and then provide rich, in-depth instruction that is designed for student understanding and transfer, which in turn, creates 21st century learners (Marzano, 2010).

Interview with an Expert

Curriculum Specialist

The focus interview is with the head of curriculum responsible for the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in the Napa Unified School District. Ms. ET has been with the school district for over 20 years.

1. How has the reception been from the teachers and administrators with the introduction of the Common Core in the Schools and eventually in the classrooms?

Teachers have some concerns about the lack of information around assessments that are currently under development – however, the response and reception has been very positive.

People like what they are seeing. We know that our History/Social Science and Science teachers as well as CTE staff will need further training in their portion of the reading/writing standards...but they, too, have been trained and are moving forward.

2. What have been your key challenges since the process began to train the teachers for the Common Core State Standard implementation?

The numbers of teachers to train! We have responded by creating 1.5 hour “splashes” for ELA, math, and content teams for ELA literacy. These “splashes” provide the essentials to get teachers started. We steer them to online resources. Myself and our instructional coaches have helped deliver splashes. We are also partnering with our county office on trainings. Attached is our roll out plan in English and Spanish...also some parent presentations we have delivered. We also have been building up our common core page www.nvusd.k12.ca.us.

3. When do you expect we will begin to see the benefits of the implementation of Common Core standards in our schools?

It will take 2-3 years for teachers to feel comfortable with the shifts. That’s why we are starting now. 2012-13 is our Initiation Year, 2013-14 is our Implementation year and 2014-15 is our Institutionalization year. If teachers focus mainly on Reading 1 and Writing 1 – close critical reading and writing with evidence, they will make great strides towards common core. The use of evidence is huge. We have boiled ELA to three main concepts: 1) building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction; 2) reading, writing and speaking grounded in evidence from text; 3) regular practice with complex text and its academic language.

4. How long will it take to see the relationship between the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and our students becoming 21st century learners?

NVUSD is already underway with a 2015 Plan and has been for three years. Over 60% of our teachers have completed 3-days of project-based learning (PBL) training. We have identified the 21st Century 4 C’s (communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity) as one of our three district goals (Goals 1: College/Career Readiness (Common Core) Goal 2: Close the

Achievement Gap (Response to Intervention; Goal 3: 21st Century Teaching and Learning (4C's). We have developed 4 C rubrics to measure growth. Technology-infused instruction, on the other hand, depends on funds. We are moving to become a BYOD district (Bring your own device). You can move one school in a couple of years...systems take more planning. We are on our way – but this is a multi-year training, coaching, implementing goal.

5. What will be the next steps for continued state and national implementation of Common Core Standards?

Ms.T said, “Releasing the benchmark assessment pieces so teachers know how that will change. Science standards are now in draft form and should be adopted by end of summer. Social studies is not yet in place. For ELA - deeper training in close reading, evidence-based argumentative writing, working with complex text and using text-dependent questions with students; in math: implementing mathematical practices standards and new content standards. Using technology with PBL to engage students in 21st century learning environments.”

6. Ms.T, please describe your training and background in the area of Common Core Standards at the elementary school level.

Ms.T said, “I attended three trainings in common core last year; then began my own online research to lead the district effort to initiate and implement common core. Trained over 500 teachers this year in ELA/math including several elementary staffs.”

Ms. T was interviewed on February 06 2013. She has been a district leader in the training and implementation of the CCSS in the school district she currently works in.

School Administrator

My second interview was with Ms. F a new principal at a K-8 elementary in the Sonoma County School District.

1. Ms. F, what is your arrival story?

I moved to California with my husband and began teaching 2nd grade at an elementary school in Marin County. I previously taught 4th grade at a school in Alabama for a few years.

2. How has the reception been from your teachers at your site regarding the introduction of the Common Core in the Schools and eventually in their classrooms?

I currently am a Principal at a K-6 school in Sonoma County. We have been working on introducing and working with the teachers to have them understand the new standards and how they are different than what they have been use to using. Many of the teachers have been receptive to the new standards and excited about the transition. We have had teachers take on teach the teacher roles where they have worked with other Districts to build the standards into our current curriculum and we now are about to adopt the math standards at 100% across our school site. Training and working with the standards has been key to our successful transition.

3. What have been your key challenges since the process began to train the teachers for the Common Core State Standard implementation?

Getting the buy in of the teachers has been important. I feel the more we talk about the standards and relate them to the current adopted curriculum we have had less push back from the teachers. We are a year around school and will begin our adoption sooner than other schools. It has been important that communication between the teachers and the administration be constant and fluid.

4. When do you expect we will begin to see the benefits of the implementation of Common Core standards in our schools? |

We should see the benefits of the implementation of Common Core Standards within the next few years. As the standards are introduced in Kindergarten and up we will see a building of the

standards into the classroom. I am excited to see our schools and learning communities in the next few years.

5. How long will it take to see the relationship between the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and our students becoming 21st century learners?

I think 21st century learning skills and CCSS successful relationship could occur even sooner than later. Our education system is changing and how we view education needs to change. We do not ask students if they want to be in school they have to be. If they are there lets give them the best environment to learn and grow as individuals in our society.

6. What will be the next steps for continued state and national implementation of Common Core Standards?

We will continue to work with our district curriculum director relating to Common Core implementation. We will continue to spend time during our staff development days to work within the CCSS and 21st century learning skills. I feel this will be a ever evolving learning from top to bottom.

7. Ms. F, please describe your training and background in the area of Common Core Standards at the elementary school level.

I have attended administrative development lectures relating to the implementation at school sites. I also was involved with a leadership group at my last school site specifically dealing with Common Core and its effect on the current standards in the elementary school classroom.

On January 10th, 2013, I interviewed Ms.F, the Principal of an elementary school in Sonoma County. She has been intimately involved in the adoption and training of CCSS at her site and within her School district.

Chapter 3 Method

Introduction

The study was a qualitative, non-experimental design by interviewing administrators and teachers currently teaching or working in an elementary and middle school setting.

Sample and Site

My first interview was with Ms.T , the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum in a local school district.. Ms.T is the forerunner in implementation of the Common Core State Standards at her school district and has become an expert to other Curriculum administrators in other school districts throughout the Bay Area.

My second interview was with Ms.F, a new Principal at a suburban elementary school. An elementary school teacher for the last 6 years, Amy was involved in the transition from California Standards Framework to the Common Core State Standards both at your previous teaching site and now as an administrator in Petaluma.

Specifically, both Ms. T and Ms. F have great experience and understand the challenges and benefits of implementing the CCSS at different sites, with exceptionally diverse student bodies. I worked with Ms.F last year and experienced first hand her commitment to teaching 21st century skills to her students. The learning environment was wrapped in whole learner skills, each relating to specific standards in math, science and language arts.

My next few interviews are with various teachers at my current elementary school teaching site and district. I have interviewed K-5 teachers who are in the process of adopting and transitioning to the CCSS.

Ethical Standards

This paper adheres to ethical standards in the treatment of human subjects in research as articulated by the American Psychological Association (2010). Additionally, the research proposal was reviewed by the Dominican University of California Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), approved, and assigned number 10069.

Access and Permissions

I currently am teaching in a k-5 elementary classroom. I have spoken and been given permission by my Principal to interview current teachers at my site. I was given permission by the Principal and District Superintendent at my current site to speak with other educators at various sites to be able to gain further information and knowledge of the relationship between Common Core State Standards and 21st century learning skills. I have made sure to communicate with the teachers and administrators regarding my research and will keep all their information confidential.

Ms. T spoke at an information session regarding Common Core State Standards at Dominican University of California. Her research and knowledge relating to the implementation of CCSS and how it relates to 21st century learning skills has been imperative to the various Districts adoption and successful transition.

Data Gathering Strategies

By interviewing educators and administrators currently working in the local public school systems, currently adopting the Common Core State Standards, I can determine their level of knowledge of the Standards and their success in relating the standards to students gaining 21st century learning skills.

My interviews were conducted individually either over the phone or in person.

I asked the following questions to each interviewee:

1. How long have you been involved in Education?
2. What were your thoughts regarding California Standards? (Currently transitioning from California State Standards to the Common Core Standards)
3. How have you been impacted by the adoption of the Common Core State Standards?
4. Please list at least one positive and one constructive feedback in regards to the adoption.
5. Do you feel Common Core State Standards address 21st century learning skills for our students?
6. If so, please specify. If not, how could it be addressed?
7. Do you think 100% adoption of the Common Core State Standards will be viable by 2014?

Data Analysis Approach

Interview notes were read by the researcher several times and placed according to feedback. The feedback from my experts as well as other individuals who are intimately involved in the process of learning and incorporating the CCSS into their site were valuable to my research. This helps to identify the challenges and benefits of adopting CCSS and moving away from the state standards previously in place.

Chapter 4 Findings

Description of Site, Individuals, Data

Data were drawn from interviews ranging from a variety of experts within the educational community. The 8 individuals interviewed were drawn from all aspects of education: the classroom teacher, elementary school principal as well as administrators who are intimately involved in the implementation of Common Core in their respective school districts and sites. Each person I spoke with and interviewed came to the same philosophy. Each of the educators that I have spoken with worked within a public elementary school site that will be at 100% adoption rate of the CCSS by 2014-2015. The Districts and school sites ranged within a 50+ miles radius and the students are drawn from a varied economic and social background. Each person interviewed has been involved in education for a minimum of 6 years- 20 years. Many of the educators were not concerned about the rigidity of the CCSS but more about the testing and state/national follow up. Each of the educators has been part of NCLB and Race to the Top initiatives mandated from the education department. The data that was drawn was based upon specific questions that were relating to the implementation and success of the CCSS as well as the 21st century learning skills all students need for success in the future.

Overall Findings, Themes

The CCSS is not like any initiative that has ever been introduced into our educational fold. Accepting a national platform for standards based instruction and incorporating a different focus to the implementation and instruction of the Standards is so unique. Overall the findings came out very positively towards a successful change in the direction of our educational focus by adopting the CCSS. “We are working from a top down dissection of the way education is

presented in the classroom,” Ms.F stated. In her school site they began the adoption of the Math standards for the CCSS three years ago and will begin the adoption of the Language Arts CCSS next year. She has attended a number of administrative trainings and visited sites to learn what is being done in the classroom. Her focus is to “take the unknown out of the CCSS and show teachers the benefit of the CCSS”. Not only is she excited about the opportunity to revitalize classroom teaching practices but to focus on “what we are teaching our students and why”. Ms.F feels that 21st century learning skills will be interwoven into the CCSS and will go hand in hand with the change.

School districts across the United States are already beginning to incorporate segments of the CCSS into their curriculum and instruction. The adoption has also gone hand in hand with educating the teachers and administrators on the differences of the new Standards. Ms.T stated, “introducing the CCSS and dissecting the standards have helped to take the mystic away from them”. As the “mystic” or unknown is taken away and sites are able to apply the standards to their day in and day out instruction, CCSS will become successful.

To create comfort, many of the Districts have made teacher workdays dedicated to dissecting the CCSS and understanding how they are different from their current teaching practices. A number of teachers that were interviewed stated that they did not feel as unsure about the CCSS adoption after working through various strands of the Language Arts standards and the newly adopted Math standards. As expected, new teachers have taken the CCSS and run with it as they have not built and based their units and school year plan based upon the old standards. Ms. F stated, “ as more teachers are able to visually see how the CCSS can be taught and incorporated into the class, the more teachers will be on board with the change.” Ms. T agreed we well. “If teachers focus mainly on Reading 1 and Writing 1 – close critical reading

and writing with evidence, they will make great strides towards common core.” The Districts that continue to focus their trainings towards CCSS and 21st century skills along with trainings relating to incorporation of technology in the classroom using the new standards as a matrix will have success.

Some interviewed were still apprehensive as to how students will be tested with the CCSS. Ms. F stated, “teachers have been so focused on testing due to the emphasis of STAR testing results being linked to district funding that understanding the new testing transition will be the most difficult for most tenured teachers to accept.” Ms. T also agreed with that statement. She stated that, “so many of our teachers are overwhelmed with meeting state standards they have not had the time to look at what the child needs to be taught to them and how teachers are meeting their needs”.

After working through the strands of the CCSS many of the experts agreed that it is a village mentality approach as we run through the CCSS. Ms. T stated that, “each year the CCSS strands builds upon itself. It pushes aside the concept that specific teachings within each grade level will not to be touched again until it appears in a upper grade level State Standards”. Due its refocus, each teacher will feel that both the upper and lower grade teachers are incorporating the new standards into their curriculum. Not only does this take the pressure off the individual teacher to touch on the standard it puts relevance into teaching through the CCSS as it will be touched on again and taught the next year and so on. The integration of 21st century learning skills will be wrapped in the focus of the CCSS and will be taught throughout all levels of education.

Chapter 5 Discussion /Analysis

Summary of Major Findings

After researching the CCSS and interviewing my experts I have found that the intent of the CCSS in the education framework will teach the necessary 21st century learning skills. The model of the standards to integrate technology, teach listening and speaking skills, and develop learning within a group based learning model will tie into the 21st century skills that are not currently being taught in the average classroom across America. Another achievement of the CCSS will be that all states will be operating under the same model for standards. With families who regularly move across America, their children will now be taught the same CCSS from state to state. This will create a consistent model to evolve and support the implementation of the CCSS.

Comparison of Findings to Previous Research

Much of the information regarding the CCSS is related to research stating successful implementation of similar standards in other countries. Due to the CCSS being recently adopted but not implemented it is difficult to compare from what we had to what we may have in the future. Our research states our current educational model is flawed. How we are able to train and support the schools, classrooms and each teacher to reach the CCSS is still to be seen. Looking at the objects and being able to pull statistical analysis within the next 5-10 years as children begin being taught using the CCSS in kindergarten and their eventual progress through school into a career setting.

Limitations/Gaps in the Study

My interviews did not yield statistical information I was hoping to come across. Until we have a range of data regarding the implementation, assessment and feedback regarding the CCSS, it will be difficult to statistically generate numbers to see if the implementation will be successful in teaching our students necessary 21st century skills through the CCSS. Transitioning to computer based testing will yield results quickly for future data yet it will be a struggle to bring all of the schools across the United States into a technologically relevant situation where testing can successfully occur on computers.

Implications for Future Research

As the data is collected and then dissected we will have a better chance to formulate the standards to fit the needs for the teacher and the students in the classroom. 21st century learning skills and the CCSS will go hand in hand as we collect data for future research. There has been extensive research conducted by experts in the United States, a range of educational experts and business leaders drawing from their experiences regarding how we are currently educating our children. There will continue to be research to build on the eventual success and failures of the implementation of the CCSS.

Overall Significance of the Study

As experts in California and the rest of the United States accepted the realization that our current educational model is failing, many educational experts and business leaders realized we as a nation are at cross roads in how we educate. Throughout the bulk of my research, looking at the interviews I conducted with educational leaders and working with the CCSS, I realized that how we educated and work with our students is flawed. Developing new CCSS and incorporating

21st century learning skills within our educational framework is a necessary criteria for success in our current educational system. Without these tools and skills we will fall behind other successful countries. This has been the case for too long and it is time to create a change, no matter how scary or unsure its future holds. We are embarking on a time of great opportunity within the educational system of the United States. If we as educators take this opportunity to change and develop how we teach to our future generation, the sky is the limit for the success of our future leaders.

About the Author

Sarah Horky entered education after working in the business world for over 20 years. Her desire to enter education was spearheaded by the constant hiring and training new college graduates who had graduated from college without any basic job skills, primarily communication and teamwork. As she looked further into reentering the educational fold she decided teaching in the elementary school classroom would be a great way to begin touching on the 21st century learning skill for our future generations. After finishing her credential program and teaching in the primary grades she became involved in the CCSS. She currently teaches 4th grade and is excited about incorporating the CCSS into her curriculum relating to 21st century learning skills.

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