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How Much is Enough? Teachers' Perceptions of Literacy Instruction and Common Core State Standards

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As public school districts and teachers seek to understand the Common Core State Standards and what it means for literacy instruction, preservice teachers in universities are also learning about literacy and standards. The International Literacy Association (2016) defines literacy as "Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, compute, and communicate using visual, audible, and digital materials across disciplines and in any context." How is this definition applied to real-life teaching in the classroom? In this study preservice teachers are involved in analyzing interview data in regards to practicing teacher perceptions and attitudes about literacy instruction and the CCSS.

INTRODUCTION

Many public school districts and teachers in states that have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in the United States have been in the process of realigning their existing curriculum, adopting new curriculum to align with the CCSS, and negotiating the new assessments (Partnership for Readiness for College & Careers/PARCC, 2016; Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium/SBAC, 2016). Teacher education programs in universities are preparing their teacher candidates to be knowledgeable about the CCSS as well as the many literacy methods and materials.

Teacher candidates in a literacy course at a regional university in the Pacific Northwest have been involved in collecting, discussing and critically analyzing interview data in regards to teacher perceptions and attitudes about literacy instruction and the Common Core State Standards. What exactly are the perceptions that practicing K-6 teachers have about the CCSS and literacy? What are K-6 public school teachers doing? How have teachers changed their teaching? The International Literacy Association, the association for reading/literacy teachers internationally and in the United States, state in their CCSS guidelines,

"The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have the potential to ensure that every child in the United States is prepared for college and careers. It is a worthy goal and one that we must work together to achieve. However, information, policies, and products aimed at helping educators to implement the ELA Common Core State Standards are being produced rapidly, sometimes with conflicting messages

about literacy practices” (International Reading Association Common Core State Standards (CCSS) Committee, 2012).

CCSS Research

Research regarding the CCSS and implementation is in the early stages, although there are many websites explaining what the CCSS are and their limitations. For example, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2012) lists CCSS considerations such as

1. The Standards define what all students are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach.
2. While the Standards focus on what is most essential, they do not describe all that can or should be taught.
3. The Standards do not define the nature of advanced work for students who meet the Standards prior to the end of high school.
4. The Standards set grade-specific standards but do not define the intervention methods or materials necessary to support students who are well below or well above grade-level expectations.
5. It is also beyond the scope of the Standards to define the full range of supports appropriate for English language learners and for students with special needs.
6. While the ELA and content area literacy components described herein are critical to college and career readiness, they do not define the whole of such readiness.

Although most school districts and states have already changed from their state standards to the CCSS, studies about K-6 teacher perspectives about teaching literacy and the CCSS are limited. However, studies of high school and K-12 teacher perspectives are beginning to be included within the literature. In one such study (Lasisi, 2016), twenty-three ELA high school teachers from one California school were surveyed.

The findings suggested that teachers wanted to acquire more knowledge about the English Language Arts (ELA) CCSS; their professional development and curricula were inadequate to meet the CCSS; and they perceived they were not ready to teach the ELA CCSS. In another national study, 456 K-12 teachers from the adopted CCSS states responded to an online survey. The findings suggest Almost all respondents believe that the common core will have an impact on their classroom instruction in the long run. Thirty-six percent report that the new standards will influence their instruction “a great deal.” With another 44 percent indicating their classroom practice will change “somewhat.” Only five percent of respondents feel the common core will not change their teaching practices at all (Education Week, 2014, p. 30).

Other current research on the CCSS has focused on investigating the comparisons between current state standards and the CCSS, policy research and development, and surveys. In one study, differences in the changes between US state standards, international standards in other countries and the CCSS were explored (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). In another CCSS arena, McDonnell and Weatherford (2013) investigated the educational policy making of the CCSS, while another study documented policy groups meeting to establish a research agenda for the CCSS (Center on Education Policy, 2013).

In regard to surveys, one CCSS Math survey of 12,000 teachers stated that 80% of the teachers had read the standards for their grade. 77% of the teachers said the CCSS were similar to their own state standards and 94% liked and would teach the CCSS (Schmidt & Borroughs, 2013). Teacher unions (American Federation of Teachers/AFT) surveyed 800 members regarding the CCSS resulting in a 75% favorable support for the CCSS, however, 83% supported a moratorium on consequences for students, teachers and schools until the standards and related assessments have been fully in use for one year, (AFT, 2013). Other union (National Education Association) surveys report that teachers are unfavorably impressed with the CCSS (Van Roekel, 2014). Van Roekel goes on to state,

“Seven out of ten teachers believe that implementation of the standards is going poorly in their schools. Worse yet, teachers report that there has been little to no attempt to allow educators to share

what's needed to get CCSS implementation right. In fact, two thirds of all teachers report that they have not even been asked how to implement these new standards in their classrooms" (2014).

METHOD

Setting

This study took place at a small regional university located in the Pacific Northwest. The teacher education program at this university graduates approximately 250-300 elementary education majors (ELED) each year. Literacy education is an important component within the ELED major with four courses (15 credits) focusing on literacy methods K-8. Each elementary education certification candidate also seeks an endorsement in another area such as literacy, bilingual/TESL, Special Education, and Early Childhood Education (ECE) being the most popular. The cumulative practicum experience for the ELED major is the traditional quarter of student teaching, unless the candidate minors in a specialist endorsement area (literacy, bilingual/TESL, ECE) where the candidate has an additional practicum in the classroom. Practical teaching applications are crucial for candidates to connect theory to practice.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of 75 teacher candidates who enrolled in the EDLT 308 Literacy I course during three different quarters. Candidates were either in their sophomore or junior year in the Teacher Education Program. Literacy I is the initial Literacy course within the ELED major and is an introductory, foundational K-8 literacy teaching course. The participating 75 K-6 teachers who were interviewed were teachers currently teaching in public schools in the state of Washington.

As part of the Literacy I course, teacher candidates were introduced to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), with the English Language Arts (ELA) standards having the main focus. According to the CCSS website of the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction

"The standards insist that instruction in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language be a shared responsibility within the school. The K-5 standards include expectations for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language applicable to a range of subjects, including but not limited to ELA. The grades 6-12 standards are divided into two sections, one for ELA and the other for history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. This interdisciplinary approach to literacy is based on research indicating that students who are college and career ready must be proficient in reading complex text from many disciplines" (Washington State OSPI, 2012).

Description of Teacher Interview

In order for teacher candidates to understand and connect to the application of the philosophical principles, literacy methods and materials they were learning about in their class sessions and course text, students interviewed practicing K-6 teachers in Washington State regarding the 'practical' aspect of teaching literacy. The teacher interview consisted of twelve open-ended questions developed by faculty with student input. The questions ranged from what programs/publishers, materials and strategies do you most often use, to what technology do your students use in the classroom for reading and writing and how do they use it? To concentrate on teachers' perspectives of literacy and the CCSS, five questions were focused on in this study. The questions were: What are the guiding principles in the teaching of literacy in your classroom, what programs/publishers, materials and strategies do you most often use to help teach/meet the Common Core State Standards, how many hours in a typical school day do you focus on teaching literacy, if you could change something about the way in which literacy is taught, what would it be, and how has the Common Core State Standards changed the teaching of literacy for you in your class?

Data Collection

Teacher candidates interviewed 75 elementary teachers in 58 different public school districts (26 rural and 32 urban) in Washington State. The teacher candidates had a choice of interviewing their selected teacher in person or over the phone.

All teachers in Washington state had been introduced to the CCSS at a variety of levels. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction’s website (OSPI, 2012) listed the timeline for CCSS adoption in the public schools for Washington state.

**TABLE 1
WASHINGTON STATE & THE CCSS ADOPTION TIMELINE**

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Adopted | July 2011 |
| Phase 1: CCSS exploration | 2010-2011 |
| Phase 2: Build awareness & begin building statewide capacity | 2011-2012 |
| Phase 3: Build state & district capacity and classroom transitions | 2012-13 |
| Phase 4: Statewide application and assessment | 2014-2015 |

The interviews were collected during the academic quarters Fall (2015), Winter (2016) and Spring (2016) and encompassed Phase 4 and beyond of the WA State timeline.

In analyzing the data from the teacher interviews, using the constant comparative method of analysis (Glasser & Strauss, 1967), themes emerged. Spradley (1980) refers to analysis as a search for patterns: “Analysis of any kind involves a way of thinking. It refers to the systematic examination of something to determine its parts, the relationship among parts, and their relationship to the whole” (p. 85).

FINDINGS

For each question, findings are organized by question, ranking of the theme, percentage of teacher responses and specific titles of the themes. The themes are presented in a table comparing and ranking teacher responses from the East (25 teachers) and Western (50 teachers) side of the state. Example teacher responses that connect to themes are presented.

Question #1: What are the guiding principles in the teaching of literacy in your classroom?

TABLE 2

| East N-25 | | | West N-50 | | |
|-----------|-----|--|-----------|-----|--|
| #1 | 41% | The Common Core State Standards | #1 | 31% | The Big 5 areas of Reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension) |
| #2 | 36% | The Big 5 areas of Reading (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension) | #2 | 28% | Mandated curriculum & materials |
| #3 | 23% | Engage in daily reading for enjoyment | #3 | 24% | The Common Core State Standards |
| | | N/A | #4 | 17% | Engage in daily reading for enjoyment |

Example teacher responses:

The Common Core State Standards

They are mandated; I use the CCSS to plan lessons and align student work; Mostly mandated standards dictate the guiding principles.

The Big 5 Areas of Reading

I want to teach the 5 basic foundations; I teach decoding and reading that shows comprehension and fluency; We start with the basic phonics and after skills are learned then we apply them.

Mandated Curriculum and Methods

I use the basal curriculum with leveled readers; Lucy Calkin’s Reading Units; Daily Five/CAFÉ, Reader’s Workshop; Walk to Read; Gradual Release Model.

All students are Capable and come with Different Abilities

With guidance and encouragement all children will learn to read given their perseverance; All children can learn to read and write well; Understand how children read and write and they are capable.

Engage in daily Reading for Enjoyment

Kids should read every day for 20 minutes at least; Teach a love of reading, I try to stress the importance of reading for pleasure.

Question #2: What programs/publishers, materials and strategies do you most often use to help you teach/meet the Common Core State standards?

TABLE 3
East N-25

| | | |
|----|-----|---|
| #1 | 41% | Mandated Big Publishers – Journeys (Houghton Mifflin) |
| #2 | 23% | Mandated Big Publishers - Reading Wonders (McGraw-Hill) |
| #3 | 19% | Mandated Small Publishers – Read Well (Voyager Sopris) |
| #4 | 17% | Variety of Mandated Supplements – Accelerated Reader (Renaissance), CIA (Read Side by Side) |

West N-50

| | | |
|----|-----|---|
| #1 | 59% | Variety of Mandated Small & Big Publishers – Reach for Reading (National Geographic), CIA (Read Side by Side), Good Habits, Great Readers (Pearson), Lucy Calkin’s Units of Study (Heinemann) |
| #2 | 17% | Mandated Small Publishers – Read Well (Voyager Sopris) |
| #3 | 12% | Mandated Big Publishers – Journeys (Houghton Mifflin) |
| #3 | 12% | Mandated Big Publishers – Reading Wonders (McGraw-Hill) |

Example teacher responses

When asked this question, teachers listed the programs that were mandated by their school or district. Mandated Big Publishers: We use a mandated curriculum that is used district wide: Journeys, Reading Wonders.

Question #3: How many hours in a typical school day do you focus on teaching literacy?

TABLE 4

| East N-25 | | | West N-50 | | |
|-----------|-----|-----------------------------|-----------|-----|---------------|
| #1 | 34% | 2-3 hours | #1 | 69% | 2-3 hours |
| #2 | 32% | 60-90 minutes | #2 | 26% | 60-90 minutes |
| #3 | 23% | All day long | #3 | 5% | All day long |
| #4 | 11% | Diverse – No set time limit | #4 | N/A | N/A |

Example teacher responses

60-90 Minutes

Distract mandated 90 minutes; Forty-five minutes of core reading guided practice every day and 45 minutes of differentiated instruction during independent time, about 90 minutes.

2-3 hours

At least 2 hours a day; 200 hours is the goal, but there is not enough time.

All day long

All day, about 5.5 hours excluding lunch and recess. I teach literacy in every content area, writing & reading go hand in hand in all lessons; If students cannot read or comprehend a text, they cannot learn in the other content areas.

Diverse

Usually 90 minutes, but if the testing shows low scores, it changes to 120 minutes; Sometimes 60 minutes in reader’s workshop and sometimes 45 minutes with guided reading.

Question #4: If you could change something about the way in which literacy is taught, what would it be? Why?

TABLE 5

| East N-25 | | | West N-50 | | |
|-----------|-----|---|-----------|-----|---|
| #1 | 56% | Freedom: Curriculum & standards too structured with no connections to student lives | #1 | 64% | Freedom: Curriculum & standards too structured with no connections to student lives |
| #2 | 23% | Slow down: Too much for abilities; not enough time | #2 | 21% | Slow down: Too much for abilities; not enough time |
| #3 | 18% | Too much testing | #3 | 8% | No changes, instruction hasn’t changed |
| #4 | 3% | No changes, instruction hasn’t changed | #4 | 7% | Too much testing |

Example teacher responses

Freedom: Curriculum & Standards too Structured with no Connections to Student Lives

The CCSS is too structured with no exploration or creativity; Get rid of the adopted basal reading curriculum, The curriculum has a more forced structure, no freedom to teach for enjoyment.

Slow down: Too much for Abilities; not Enough Time

Too much, I have concerns about how developmentally appropriate the CCSS are for young children; The CCSS are not developmentally appropriate for children, especially those in high poverty schools.

Too much Testing

I think there is too much emphasis on standardized assessments; The testing has gotten out of hand; I have to teach to the test.

No Changes, Instruction hasn’t Changed

Not much has changed, it hasn’t affected my teaching; No changes.

Question #5: How has the Common Core State Standards changed the teaching of literacy for you in your class?

TABLE 6

| East N-25 | | | West N-50 | | |
|-----------|-----|---------------------------|-----------|-----|------------------------------|
| #1 | 36% | Specific skills to teach | #1 | 38% | No change in instruction |
| #2 | 27% | No change in instruction | #2 | 28% | Too structured – More stress |
| #3 | 27% | More testing | #3 | 23% | More testing |
| #4 | 10% | Raised the bar - rigorous | #4 | 5% | Raised the bar - rigorous |

Example teacher responses

Specific skills to teach

The CCSS has brought awareness to the specifics of what students should know at each grade level; Focused curriculum, more specific skills.

No change in instruction

The CCSS were very similar to what the state standards were before, so there are not many changes; It is not different for me; For my class it hasn't changed.

More testing

There is more testing; Everything focuses on assessment.

Too structured – More stress

The CCSS overwhelms student and teachers; More pressure, kids have to learn to adapt.

Raised the bar – rigorous

Rigorous, everyone has to teach the same thing; The CCSS has increased the rigor; It has raised the bar and holds teachers more accountable.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore practicing K-6 teachers' perceptions and attitudes regarding literacy teaching and the Common Core State Standards. The 75 interviews of teacher perceptions of what reading/literacy programs, how reading/literacy is taught, and how much literacy should be taught within the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) served as a practical moment to help preservice teaching candidates connect theory and current practice in Washington schools.

Teacher candidates interviewed teachers during an introductory literacy course. Five questions were focused on in this study: What are the guiding principles in the teaching of literacy in your classroom, what programs/publishers, materials and strategies do you most often use to help you teach/meet the Common Core State Standards, how many hours in a typical school day do you focus on teaching literacy, if you could change something about the way in which literacy is taught, what would it be?, and how has the Common Core State Standards changed the teaching of literacy for you in your class?

The findings were organized by question, ranking of the theme, percentage of teacher responses and specific titles of the themes. The broad themes are presented in tables comparing and ranking teacher responses from the East and Western side of the state. Example teacher responses that reflected the themes were presented.

For Question #1

What are the guiding principles in the teaching of literacy in your classroom, for the East side of the state the #1 (41%) and #2 (36%) responses from teachers were fairly close. Teachers absolutely stated that the CCSS was the guiding factor of the teaching of literacy in their classroom, or they focused on The Big 5 areas of Reading (National Reading Panel, 2000). Twenty-three percent of the teachers from the East side stated that their chief principle of literacy instruction was to make sure that children engaged in daily reading for enjoyment. The teachers from the West side of the state were close in their rankings. Thirty-one percent focused on The Big 5 areas of Reading (NRP, 2000), while 28% of the teachers stated that the mandated curriculum was the driving force behind their instruction. While the East side teachers had the CCSS as the #1 ranking for guiding principles, only 24% of the teachers from the West side indicated that the CCSS were the guiding principles behind their literacy instruction which was ranked as #3 in terms of responses. Finally, 17% of the West side teachers indicated that daily reading for enjoyment was their guiding principle for literacy instruction in their classrooms.

As the CCSS were adopted in 2011 by Washington state, implemented by 2014-15 on the Washington state timeline, and mandated to be the guiding principles or goals for instruction, teachers from both sides of the state had differing responses. It seems that teachers' beliefs strongly affect the guiding principles, materials and activities they choose for the classroom (Harste, Woodward & Burke, 1984). While many teachers have 'bought in' to the CCSS, other teachers seemed to be still focused on the results of the Reading Panel's report, indicating that phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension were the main pillars and guiding principles of literacy instruction (NRP, 2000). Richardson (1998) states that teacher change may hinge on who is directing the change. Is it a top-down change or does it come from personal teacher research? Teachers often resist change mandated or suggested by others, but they do engage in change that they initiate (Richardson, 1998).

For Question #2

What programs/publishers, materials and strategies do you most often use to help you teach/meet the Common Core State Standards, an overwhelming 64% of the East side teachers utilized only two basal reading curriculums (Journeys & Reading Wonders) published by big publishers. Nineteen percent of the East side teachers focused on a basal reading curriculum published by a smaller publisher, and 17% used a variety of mandated supplements in their classrooms. The West side teachers indicated that they used a much wider variety of mandated curriculums (59%), than the East side teachers. While 24% of the West side teachers used Journeys and Reading Wonders from the big publishers, only 17% focused on a mandated reading curriculum from a small publisher.

As many school districts began to shift to the CCSS, teachers in committees during 2013-2014 were working on realigning existing reading basal curriculums, or schools were adopting new commercial, CCSS aligned basal curriculums (Butterfield & Fennerty, 2014). A commercial basal was ready-made for teachers. For example, McGraw-Hill (2016) touts on its website, "Reading Wonders provides the instructional support and materials you will only find in a program that was created to teach the rigor, intent, and depth of the new Common Core State Standards." Questions remain however. If the CCSS is mandated for all Washington schools, why do the West side teachers have such a wider variety of curriculum than the East side teachers? Does teacher choice, knowledge and expertise impact the curriculum decisions, or are school districts 'playing it safe' by selecting a teacher-proof reading basal curriculum that is "built upon a research-based instructional design with proven efficacy results" (Houghton-Mifflin Harcourt, 2016)?

For Question #3

How many hours in a typical school day do you focus on teaching literacy, East side teachers were fairly evenly split between teaching literacy for 2-3 hours a day (34%) or for teaching a 60-90 minute block a day (32%). Twenty-three percent indicated that they teach literacy all day long, while 11% stated that they had no set time limit. In other words, teachers may teach literacy for 2-3 hours for one day, and 90 minutes the next day. West side teachers overwhelming indicated that they teach literacy for 2-3 hours

every day (69%). Twenty-six percent of the responses indicated that teachers teach literacy for 60-90 minutes a day and 5% of the teachers indicated that they teach literacy all day long.

A question the preservice teacher candidates asked was why the differing instruction times? The differences could be connected to how teachers define literacy. Do they define literacy as The Big 5 areas of Reading (National Reading Panel, 2000), where literacy is broken down into discrete skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension)? Teaching literacy for a 90-minute block was an ideal recommendation coming out of the National Reading Panel report (2000). However, in many classrooms, a 90-minute reading block, or even less time spent teaching literacy produces only 10-15 minutes of actual reading, or less than 20 percent of the allocated reading time is spent reading (Allington, 2002). In the effective classrooms that Allington (2002) studied over ten years, teachers with a much broader definition of literacy had children reading for over half of the school day. Rather than holding a skill perspective of teaching literacy, broader definitions may define literacy as what we want all students to know, learn and do. In other words, literacy encompasses the knowledge and skills students need to access, understand, analyze and evaluate information, make meaning, express thoughts and emotions, present ideas and opinions, interact with others and participate in activities at school and in their lives beyond school (Ewing, 2016). If teachers hold this perspective, literacy instruction permeates the school day.

For Question #4

If you could change something about the way in which literacy is taught, what would it be, the overwhelming response from both East (56%) and West (64%) side teachers was freedom. Teachers indicated that the adopted curriculum and standards were too structured with no connections to student lives. Again, both East (23%) and West (21%) side teachers indicated that the pace of teaching with the CCSS was just too rushed. They responded that the pace needed to slow down. There was too much to teach for abilities and not enough time to teach. East (18%) and West (7%) side teachers stated that there was too much testing, while East (3%) and West (7%) side teachers indicated that there was nothing to change as their instruction hadn't changed as the result of the CCSS.

It has been known for a long time that changes in teachers' beliefs precede changes in their teaching practices (Bailey, 1992; Golombek, 1998). Top down sweeping mandates much like the CCSS and mandated new curriculums take time and sustainable conversations with professional development to have a successful impact in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 1990). Teachers may resist or not see the benefits of change when they feel change is imposed by those who think they know what teachers should be doing in the classroom (commercial basal curriculums), and are in a position to tell them what to do (administrators & state mandates). Morimoto (1973) states

When change is advocated or demanded by another person, we feel threatened, defensive, and perhaps rushed. We are then without the freedom and the time to understand and to affirm the new learning as something desirable, and as something of our own choosing. Pressure to change, without an opportunity for exploration and choice, seldom results in experiences of joy and excitement in learning (p.255).

For Question #5

How has the Common Core State Standards changed the teaching of literacy for you in your class. It was interesting to note that for the #1 ranking, East side teachers (36%) stated that there were now specific skills to teach while West side teachers (38%) indicated that the CCSS had no impact on their instruction. East side teachers (27%) responded that the CCSS had not changed their instruction and 23% of West side teachers indicated that for their instruction the CCSS were too structured. There was more stress in trying to meet all that was expected. Both East (27%) and West (23%) side teachers indicated that with the CCSS there was much more testing involved. Ten percent of the East side teachers and five percent of West side teachers stated that the CCSS has raised the rigor in their teaching.

Some of the results from this last question seem to contradict the responses from question # 4. Preservice teachers were intrigued and wondered why if a majority of the teachers wanted freedom from

mandated curriculum and the CCSS, 27% of East and 38% of West side teachers stated that the CCSS had not change their literacy instruction. What could this mean? Could it mean that teachers were feeling generally dissatisfied with the CCSS and adopted curriculum and chose not to incorporate them in their teaching? Or could it be that teachers did not want to appear overly negative in their responses to the teacher candidates who were interviewing them.

The responses to question #5 also seemed to contradict the responses to a national survey of 500 teachers on their perspectives on the CCSS. Thirty-six percent reported that the new standards will influence their instruction “a great deal,” with another 44 percent indicating their classroom practice will change “somewhat” (Education Week Research Center, 2013).

Both East (27%) and West (23%) side teachers indicated that with the CCSS more testing seemed to have a larger focus than before the CCSS were mandated. As one teacher stated, “Everything focuses on assessment.”

In a previous study of teacher perceptions of the CCSS (Butterfield & Fennerty, 2014), Washington state teachers seemed more positive about rigor where the CCSS “brings more critical thinking and helps prepare student thinking for what is ahead. Students will be better prepared for college & career, read more informational text, and have deeper knowledge” (p.7). Instead only 10% of East side teachers and 5% of West side teachers expressed positivity in that the CCSS raised the bar for students.

CONCLUSION

General findings seem to indicate that teachers have moved beyond the WA state timeline and are currently in Phase 4: Statewide application and assessment, and beyond. The CCSS are touted as a major advance not only because of their shared nature, but also because they represent a more rigorous set of goals than most individual states had previously adopted (Shanahan, 2013). It is said that the CCSS will change the climate of literacy instruction in the classroom. They will raise the bar by requiring complex text and close reading practices that will challenge children. The CCSS place the text – not the teacher- at the center of students’ negotiation of text meaning (Shanahan, 2013).

However, the findings from this study do not seem to support the goals of the CCSS as stated above. Teachers seem to have mixed feelings about the CCSS. Some are focusing on the CCSS as teaching goals and as specific skills, some are teaching literacy the way they have always taught literacy, and some are still focusing on the Big 5 Areas of Reading (The Reading Panel, 2000). At this time, for teachers in this study, there does seem to be a general dissatisfaction with the CCSS and literacy instruction as indicated with the responses from question #4. Perhaps the concrete realities of teaching with numerous factors such as large classes sizes, varieties of student abilities and languages spoken in the classroom, socio-economic status, to name a few, don’t mesh with what looks good on paper policy.

FURTHER ANALYSIS

The original intent of this study was to gather the perceptions of practicing teachers to inform and inspire preservice teacher candidates. However, the data collected has been useful in helping preservice candidates connect theory and text-book learning to the practical applications of practicing teachers. Preservice teachers have been able to question, discuss, refine their own teacher beliefs as well as engage in reflective critical analysis of curriculum, methods and materials for teaching literacy.

To further explore teacher perceptions of the CCSS and literacy teaching, additional questions could be added to the existing interview. The questions below could be added to further investigate teacher perceptions, but would also serve to broaden teacher candidate awareness of the CCSS and literacy teaching.

Such questions include: Where did you receive your information about the CCSS? How has the CCSS impacted the teaching of literacy to English as a Second Language students? If you had the freedom to teach literacy any way in your classroom, what methods and materials would you use?

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