Top Down Policy and the Intersection of Teacher Belief and Action: A Photo Elicitation Study of the Impacts of Common Core State Standards

Renee M.R. Moran, East Tennessee State University,
Huili Hong, Vanderbilt University,
Karin J. Keith, Stacey Fisher, & LaShay Wood,
East Tennessee State University

Abstract

This paper focuses on the relationship between policy creation and policy enactment through the use of an innovative qualitative research methodology, photo elicitation. Teachers applying Common Core State Standards were studied in two states through in-depth interviews, photographs captured by the participants, and other artifacts. Findings indicated the influence of bi-partisan politics on policy implementation as well as teachers' tendencies to map previous practices onto the new standards. Additionally, data demonstrated the influence of state mandated assessment on teachers' perceptions of the standards. This study provides new insights on teachers' interpretations, evaluations, and self-reflections of the CCSS and the related practical experiences through a rigorous micro-analysis of their professional conversations with teacher educators/university researchers.

Introduction

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS), developed by the United States National Governor's Association in conjunction with the Council of Chief State School Officers, were launched in 2009 and to date have been adopted in forty-one states, four territories, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and the District of Columbia (www.corestandards.org, 2021). However, since the original launch date, opposition to the implementation has abounded. As politicians and policy makers scurried to appease the increasingly loud opposition to CCSS and the apparent politicized nature of the implementation, states began to backtrack. Several states have adapted, eliminated, revised, or renamed the standards. Meanwhile, the debate continues, though more quietly it seems. Proponents view the creation of common standards as a springboard for success in college and career readiness, particularly because of increased focus on demanding content that must be understood and applied as well as the requirement of strong foundational skills in disciplinary reasoning, text-based argumentation, and inference (Coburn et al., 2016; Jenkins & Agamba, 2013).

Those in opposition lament lack of local control and a federal government overreach. In hindsight, it is perhaps unsurprising that what seemed at first to be an innocuous policy became quite politically charged resulting in quick repeals. As McDonnell & Weatherford (2016) note, policies that are ripe for political vulnerability are also likely be severely impacted at the implementation and enaction stages.

In our work, we strive to connect policy implementation to those in the "trenches," teachers, as we seek to understand how CCSS policy implementation impacted the day-to-day lives of teachers and students. We argue that understanding this piece of the puzzle is critical to future successful policy implementation. Roskos and Neuman (2013) note that a common set of standards inevitably shapes the daily instructional decisions made in the K-12 classroom. "Although standards may serve as a Common Core framework, they nonetheless must be integrated into the fabric of local classroom life and be responsive to the wider world if they are to really work" (Roskos & Neuman, 2013, p. 471). The notion of understanding the impact of policy on classroom life at a micro level is the foundation of this research study. Scholars note the difficulty of conducting research that accurately measures the impacts of CCSS with emphasis on test scores as a measure with limited reliability as well as conflicting variables for different states such as funding, hesitation of teachers to respond to inquiries about implementation, and the challenge of measuring college readiness (Angrist, Cohodes, Dynarski, Pathak, & Walters, 2016; Hughes, Daro, Holtzman, & Middleton, 2013; Polikoff, 2017;).

Taking these cautions into account, in this paper we work to understand the contexts of CCSS implementation and application in elementary classrooms. This study was conducted in the 2015-2016 school year. While the two states referenced officially rolled out CCSS in 2010, generally, three of the districts we studied were slower to move to full implementation of the new standards due to varying reasons. In one district, superintendent and district turnover led to a more focused initiative relating to CCSS in 2015. In two other districts, teachers explained that while CCSS implementation was expected by 2012, they described it as a "surface level" expectation that was generally not adhered to. Additionally, in both states teachers noted that for the first few years of CCSS implementation standardized state and district tests were aligned to old standards. Teachers noted that this required a balancing act that involved teaching a portion of the new standards while also preparing students for testing that was still aligned to the previous standards. By the time we began our study in 2015, all district tests were aligned to CCSS standards, and all schools were in full implementation mode. It is important to note that by 2017, nearing the end of our study, the state legislators had voted to repeal use of CCSS based on political opposition and large numbers of parent complaints. However, it was widely recognized that in the states studied and many others, the standards were changed in name only. CCSS was removed from the title of the standards, but the majority of the standards were either left the same or lightly revised. As recently as 2020, the state superintendent accused legislators of simply tweaking CCSS and renaming it. He argued for a path to completely overhaul the standards and remove any remnants of CCSS that are remaining. While total removal has not yet occurred, those who oppose CCSS are still fighting for a standards reexamination and reconstruction.

We believe that looking back to how teachers have processed standards reform and other top-down policy in the past is key to bettering these efforts in the future. To further understand a top-down policy implementation at a grass roots level, we probed teachers' perspectives and practices of CCSS through analysis of their professional conversations with colleagues and university researchers. To examine the teacher's perspectives, we employed a micro discourse analysis of photo-elicited interviews (Collier & Collier, 1986) we conducted with teachers. We chose this

method because we believed that the interview process would help us understand teacher perspective and that the photographs would enhance this understanding as well as furnish visual elements that would provide prospective on the classroom culture and environment. This study addresses the need in the field for more research on how CCSS impacts the daily lives and practices of teachers in America. However, more broadly this study may serve as a model for studying policy implementation and its impacts on teacher belief and autonomy as well as contribute to the greater body of existing research on the intersection of teacher belief and policy enactment. In the following sections, we discuss a short history of policy reforms followed by a relevant review of teacher belief.

A Short History of Policy Reforms

In the last few decades of American educational history, there has been a notable shift from local control of school policy to federalization of decision-making in our schools (Allington, 2002; Henig, 2015; Jennings, 2018). The first half of the 20th century was characterized by a largely hands-off approach by both the state and federal governments; however, the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Title I altered this (McGill-Franzen, 2000). In the 1960s, President Johnson viewed the legislation as a means to filter money into districts with large numbers of low-income, high-need students. For many, the enactment symbolized the encroachment of the federal government upon the jurisdiction of the local school districts (Cross, 2004).

ESEA was followed in the 1970s by another important piece of legislation, PL 94-142, which required disabled students to have access to public education. The law resulted in immense increases in the number of special-education students. Originally, the idea was that the federal government would share in the monetary responsibility for disabled students, but ultimately the legislation was underfunded, which left school districts scrambling to allocate their resources appropriately (Cross, 2004; McGill-Franzen, 2000).

While ESEA and PL 94-142 certainly increased the federal government's role in education, overall, the focus was on funding rather than accountability. This focus changed in the 1980s with the notion of systemic reform, which promoted the view that not only is the government capable of improving the educational system, they are responsible for supplying authorizations and incentives to further policy (McGill-Franzen, 2000). ESEA was reauthorized in 2015 as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and offered greater flexibility to states. Funding was reauthorized in 2021.

Standards-based reforms began in the 1980s and were advanced by a variety of professional organizations such as the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Literacy Association. The notion was that standards could be a basis for policy that supported high expectations for students in conjunction with stronger instructional supports for teachers (Coburn et. al, 2016; Smith & O'Day, 1991). Proponents of this movement hoped for improvements in both teaching and learning; however, success varied from school to school and district to district. Cohen (1990) noted that changes were often surface level, and teachers regularly used new materials in traditional ways.

Accountability reforms began in the 1980s and were followed in the late 1990s and 2000s with the enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and more recently high stakes teacher evaluation, which was spurred by immense funding from the Race to the Top federal grant. McGill-Franzen (2000) notes that the complexity of teaching lends itself to unpredictability in terms of policy outcomes. Likewise, others point to a tenuous relationship between policy creation and

policy enactment (Coburn, 2001; Spillane, 1999;), with attention paid to the individual resources of the teacher including prior knowledge, disposition, and beliefs.

Coburn et al., (2016) argue that our educational system is undergoing the merging of these two movements of accountability and standards-based reform. For example, as CCSS was rolled out across the country, simultaneously high stakes teacher evaluation was also enacted. Thus, Coburn and colleagues (2016) posit that "teachers are experiencing CCSS and new accountability schemes concurrently as new tests are launched and curriculum materials and professional development are becoming available. Any effort to investigate one of these policy initiatives must take the presence of the other into account" (p. 246).

Logic of Inquiry: Examining CCSS in Relation to Teacher Belief

An additional criterion to consider when examining the failure or success of policy is teacher belief. Research has demonstrated that even well-meaning policy implementations fail when teacher beliefs are not taken into account because these beliefs are at the core of instructional decision making (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Eisenhart et al., 2001). It seems that whether or not policy becomes a viable part of classroom practice depends heavily on individual teacher beliefs. In fact, whether purposely or not, educators ignored or amended policy implementation not in concordance with their beliefs (Eisenhart et al., 2001). Despite a wealth of research on the influence of teacher beliefs, most school improvement efforts continue to focus on changing only the behavior of educators rather than working on both beliefs and behaviors (Guerra & Nelson, 2009). Guerra and Nelson (2009) cited this omission as the primary rationalization for lack of change in educational outcomes particularly for students who are diverse in terms of language, economics, or culture.

According to Begum (2012), "beliefs are psychologically held understandings, premises or propositions about the world that are felt to be true" (p. 16). Beliefs are commonly fixed and are not easily changed by outside influences (Nespor, 1987; Ogan-Bekiroglue & Akkoc, 2009). In addition, beliefs do not necessarily have to be endorsed by others for an individual to hold fast to them (Haney & McArthur, 2002). According to Begum (2012), beliefs are comprised of a fusion between each person's subjective experiences and the learning and knowledge they acquire throughout their lifetime.

As noted by Richards and Lockhart (1994), "teachers' beliefs and values serve as the background to much of their decision making and actions, and hence constitute what has been termed the culture of teaching" (p. 30). In other words, a teacher's belief system will guide what they do and say in the classroom and what they deem important or inconsequential in terms of classroom instruction (Begum, 2012).

In this way, the intersection between the problems of policy reform and teacher belief becomes apparent. For instance, if a policy implementation or curricular framework does not align with a teacher's belief system, then he or she may be less likely to effectively implement the change in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers may alter the way they teach to match more closely with what they believe about appropriate instruction. A teacher may spend more instructional time on a classroom activity that they view as credible in terms of furthering student learning (Powers, Zippay, & Butler, 2006). In this manner, beliefs will always influence the way programs are carried out and, in many cases, student achievement and investment. Begum (2012) states:

What teachers teach may be determined by an authority separate from the teacher, but the way the teachers interpret the curriculum or the syllabus, the way they enact the curriculum in the classroom context, is strongly influenced by their belief regarding what and how the students should be taught (p. 17).

Teacher beliefs or world views may impinge upon a teacher's willingness to embrace a particular policy from the outset. For example, a teacher might believe that there is nothing new to be learned and therefore, be resistant to professional development or new literature or techniques (Buehl & Fives, 2009).

Methodology

Theoretical Framing

This paper is grounded in the applications of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2013; Gee, 2014; Rogers, 2011; Taylor, 2004; Weiss & Wodak, 2007), discourse studies (Blommaert, 2005; Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005; Lester, 2014) and interactional sociolinguistics (Green & Wallet, 1981; Gumperz, 1986; Volosinov, 1929/1973) to the analysis of professional conversations (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Feldman, 1994; Hollingsworth, 1994; Talbot, 2015; Tillema & Orland-Barak, 2006). We also include the theoretical work of Bakhtin (1981, 1986) and Volosinov (1929/1973) in our theoretical framework, specifically their assertion of the inherent dialogical nature of language such that any utterance is always a reflection of and refraction of other people's words and utterances. This theoretical framework focuses attention on how the participants, the seven elementary school teachers, represent the perspectives and practices of the CCSS they enact in and through their use of language and other contextualization cues (c.f. Gumperz, 1986) in their professional conversations with university researchers. Attention was not only paid to how the teachers acted and reacted to the university researchers in their photo-elicited interviews (Bloome, 2005) but also to the relationships of social events to each other (the relationship of their prior and current teaching practices) and the relationship of local and broader social contexts (the relationship of their classroom teaching practice to the various social, educational, or political institution). While this study was not an ethnography, we leaned on Spradley's (1979) notion of ethnographic interview so that we might understand the teachers' point of view in relationship to this policy implementation, Lastly, we examined the intersection of teacher belief and implementation of CCSS.

Research Contexts and Participants

Data was collected within four school districts in the Appalachian region of the United States. Seven teachers were recruited based on the following criteria: employment at a K-5 public school in Appalachia, current school-wide implementation CCSS, and participants who were willing to take photographs of literacy instruction and engage in recorded in-depth interviews. The table below gives more specific information on each participant.

Table 1: *Participant Background and Context*

Name of School	Context of School Site	Teacher Information	Teacher Information	Teacher Information
Happy Valley Elementary School	Geographic Information: Rural Student Population: 94% Caucasian; 6% Other Socio-Economic Factors: 57% of students receive free and reduced lunch	Teacher 1: Kelly 1st grade teacher Years of Experience: 16 Educational Level: Master's Degree	Teacher 2: Nancy 2nd grade teacher Years of Experience: 21 Educational Level: Bachelor's Degree	Teacher 3: Holly ESL K-12 teacher Years of Experience: 11 Educational Level Bachelor's Degree
Washington Elementary School	Geographic Information: Suburban Student Population: 90% Caucasian; 10% Other Socio-Economic Factors: 12% of students receive free and reduced lunch	Teacher 1: Dana 3rd grade teacher Years of Experience: 16 Educational Level: Master's Degree		
Spring Mountain Elementary	Geographic Information: Rural Student Population: 62% Caucasian; 23% Black; 15% Hispanic Socio-Economic Factors: 97% of students receive free and reduced lunch	Teacher 1: Kim 2nd grade teacher Years of Experience: 17 Educational Level: Master's Degree	Teacher 2: Sandy 1st grade teacher Years of Experience: 18 Educational Level: Master's Degree	
Anderson Branch Elementary	Geographic Information: Rural Student Population: 91% Caucasian; 7% Hispanic; 2% Other	Teacher 1: Ali 6th grade teacher Years of Experience: 30		

	Socio-Economic Factors: 69% of students receive free and reduced lunch	Educational Level: EdS		

Data Collection

Teacher Interviews: Our rationale for participant interviews was to "uncover the meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds" (Hatch, 2002, p. 91). We align with the thoughts of Spradley (1979), who articulated the purpose of ethnographic interviews thus:

> I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you would explain them. (p. 34)

With this framework, each teacher participated in a semi-structured interview at the end of each week of data collection. Data was collected at three different points of the school year. During interviews, teachers shared the photographs captured in their naturally occurring English Language Arts (ELA) classes and used them as a springboard to discuss their perspectives and how ELA CCSS is or is not being implemented.

Photographs of Literacy Instruction: Each teacher took photographs of literacy instruction over the course of a week at three different points in the year. We asked teachers to capture literacy instruction without specific directives, so they (rather than the researchers) made deliberate choices about what to share (Holm, 2008). Photographs included ELA CCSS as well as other literacy instruction that teachers might have viewed as not aligning with CCSS. Photographs were used as a starting point for conversation and artifacts for document analysis.

Unobtrusive Data: Based on the premise that documents help us understand the workings of a particular institution (Patton, 1990), literacy lesson plans were also collected.

Data Analytic Approach

Photo-elicited interview was adopted to seek for a deep understanding of the teachers' interpretation, evaluation, and self-reflection of CCSS and their related practical experiences. We view photo elicitation as a means of transformation in our research epistemologies and methodologies. Traditionally, photo elicitation has been underutilized in the research community (Grady, 2001) particularly because sociological research has primarily been a "word-based discipline" (Epstein, et al., 2006). In fact, in the past researchers have questioned whether visual images truly relay accurate depictions of whatever is being studied (Harper, 2002). However, as the visual sophistication of our culture increases, we are witnessing a shift in this viewpoint (Ball & Smith, 1992). Holm (2008) notes that photographs can be used during interviews "not only to encourage the interviewee to tell about their everyday lives, remember past events or to unlock forgotten information, but also to reveal participants' hidden views and values" (p. 2). Likewise, others note that the content and process of photo elicitation can serve as windows into the social relationships

of participants (Epstein, et. al, 2006; Rasmussen, 2004; Barker & Smith, 2012). Accessibility of this technology (e.g. digital cameras, iphones, ipods, etc.) has now made this methodology easier to apply and affordable (Epstein, et. al, 2006).

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed (c.f. Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005). We began with open coding of transcripts and proceeded with axial coding, comparing the categories in each transcript and across different transcripts generated with the same and different teachers (Glaser & Strauss, 1971). We then mapped out findings and cases in order to summarize and interpret teachers' shared and/or "outlier" perspectives. These findings became the emerging themes of the study. Each researcher initially worked individually and then compared codes and categories to ensure interrater reliability. After completing coding cycles for each participant's data set, we engaged in analytic memoing, a process of informal writing which addressed a direct reaction to a code. We completed memos to define each code which assisted with inter-coder reliability. Saldana (2009) notes that analytic memoing is a natural result of the coding process and that codes tend to spur the need for written reflection as we ponder each code's deeper insights. This process allowed our research team to engage in a deeper process of reflexivity as well.

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

This paper focuses on four major themes that we compiled through the process of data analysis. These included: the influence of politics, the mapping of previous practice onto CCSS, the driving force of accountability/standardized testing, and particular literacy focused issues.

The Influence of Politics

Participants noted that politics permeate various aspects of their jobs. In particular, our data analysis demonstrated teachers' perceptions relating to politics in the following ways: lack of control as educators, constantly shifting curricula and standards, and the influence of bipartisan politics. Because of the dynamic nature of politics and the shifting policies that often occur as new administrations take over; it is important to note that this data was collected during the Obama administration. In both states during this time, governors' offices and state legislators were controlled by Republicans.

Several participants expressed that they have little control over the standards, curriculum, and assessment that they are required to carry out. While teachers viewed themselves as vital components in the process, they noted that they rarely felt included in the creation of policy. Holly explained, "Don't ask us. The politicians won't let us do it. And I mean, that's been the story for a long time." Teachers believed that not only were they not given a say in the creation of CCSS, but that the tradition of barring teachers from the discourse of policy creation had a long history, a history they had come to expect.

Not only did teachers feel they had little voice in the development and enactment of CCSS, they also demonstrated high levels of mistrust in those creating it. This mistrust was coupled with a lack of clarity in terms of who actually created the standards. When asked who wrote the standards, Kelly pondered, "I'm pretty sure it was like a team of people that came together and worked out of D.C.", but she was unsure of the specifics of that team. Likewise, Holly demonstrated a

wariness towards those she viewed in positions of powers in terms of policy creation, "You heard our wonderful state rep. She has no idea what she's talking about."

During the process of data collection, there were rumors of a movement away from CCSS. By 2017, CCSS had formally been redacted. However, standards were altered very little. Essentially the Common Core label was removed, but the new "state" standards looked almost identical to the previous CCSS format. Teachers lamented the ever-shifting landscape of curriculum. From their views, policy was rarely successful because they believed that ample time was not being given to see if a measure could truly work. Holly explained, "I'm just doing Common Core and whatever they give me next year. We can just roll into the next theme." This belief that standards and/or curriculum would rarely stay constant, led to a lack of motivation for implementation. Additionally, teachers indicated concern for children who were not receiving a fluid curriculum. "It is nerve-wracking," Nancy said. "Because we've got this portion of children that start with one curriculum, and then it changes. So, I feel like their education is hodge-podged because they start with one curriculum and then it changes."

Participants also viewed bi-partisan tensions as the root of CCSS issues and argued that often these political issues were unrelated to what they saw as the "real issues" of implementation. Holly noted, "CCSS seems like a really big example of something that should work, that the governors asked for, created themselves, and then the very one that's the chair of this decision-making committee then turns around and says we don't want to have anything to do with it. It's all about misinformation. It's political." Teachers believed that the merging of bipartisan politics in the media and respective communities led to further miscommunication between parents, teachers, and schools and particularly a negative view of CCSS. Kelly argued this when she explained, "It's all about politics. It's all about hating certain parties and certain individual politicians. They want the president (Obama) to fail and his administration to fail. They said it from day one—if it happened under his watch then it must be wrong and evil and our children are going to grow horns or whatever." Teachers admitted that their own political beliefs influenced how they viewed new policy and their willingness to accept or reject said policy.

Mapping Teaching Practice onto CCSS

Authors of CCSS note that it is purposefully non-prescriptive without specific directives so that teachers are "free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards" (CCSS; National Governor's Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 4). Our data indicated that participants regularly mapped what we recognized as formerly implemented practices onto CCSS. This assumes some characteristics of and sheds new insight on the "procedural display" described in Bloome, Puro, and Theodorou's (1989) study on doing lessons as a set of interactional procedures with little reflective thought about the meaning or purpose of the instruction. While describing pictures of ELA CCSS, teachers regularly named instruction and practices as CCSS, as they simultaneously used language we recognized as embedded in a variety of well-known curricula.

Perhaps because of the lack of specific directives of the CCSS, several participants noted that a variety of instructional practices could fit under the umbrella of the standards. Holly explained, "You can do a worksheet and do Common Core." Likewise, several other participants discussed and photographed their methods of CCSS. In some cases, they directly identified the curricula to which they referred. For example, Dana said, "I use the model based by Fountas and

Pinnell based on their balanced literacy program. In other cases, participants discussed ELA CCSS without naming a particular program or curricula, but by still using language that indicated their use of a certain method. For example, Dana used language of the Daily Five, a literacy strategy focusing on station work and reading and writing, when referring to center work in her classroom. Interestingly, some participants used language easily recognizable from past programs and trainings held in districts while naming it as CCSS. The following programs were either directly or indirectly referred to during interviews: Literature Circles, Balanced Literacy, Reader's Notebook, Self-Selected Texts, Novel Study, Leveled Readers, Interactive Notebooks, Genre Baskets, Orton Gillingham, Writing Workshop, Lester Laminack, Debbie Miller, Norma Kimsey, and Literacy Collaborative.

What is Driving Education, CCSS or the Test*?*

Data analysis pointed to deep entanglements between the roll out of CCSS and state accountability measures. In one of the states studied, CCSS was adopted concurrently with newly enacted legislation calling for an increase in statewide accountability. Particular assessments were mandated and the schedule of how and when they were to be given was to be strictly adhered to. According to one teacher this included up to 33 tests per student per grading period. Nancy explained, "For our kids that are high risk [they test] every 2 weeks. For kids that are at medium risk, 4 weeks. I have 7 kids that are having to do it every 2 or 4 weeks."

Due to blurring of lines between accountability and standards implementation, teachers discussed the tests and CCSS interchangeably and named CCSS as responsible for the heavy accountability recently implemented. This is illustrated in Nancy's comment as she showed a photograph of students in the process of test taking. "We were just finishing up our formative and summative assessments which is a huge part of Common Core. We assess all the time now, all the time." She shared another photograph showing Nancy and a student using an iPad. She explained,

> This picture demonstrates progress monitoring utilizing the Reading 3D program. That's the thing with Common Core, we assess all the time. Math, reading, it's almost daily. We are progress monitoring, and then we are doing interventions if they are not meeting it. So, it's a lot of one on one, so the classroom has changed a lot. It's more difficult, more challenging to manage.

The photograph shared illustrates that many of the assessments required must be administered individually using the iPad. Nancy and others indicated large blocks of lost class time due to accountability requirements. Often CCSS was directly or indirectly mentioned as the cause of these requirements or at least in alignment with them, despite the accountability measures being state mandated and disconnected from CCSS.

Mixed Reactions to CCSS

General Positive Reactions to CCSS

Participants discussed both pros and cons they saw to the implementation of CCSS. In many ways, teachers believed the new standards to be an improvement in comparison to previously

used state standards. Several participants noted that they were less overwhelming and more congruent than their former standards. Dana noted that: "Common Core was well-written, cohesive and in a better sequence than the old [state standards]." She believed they better prepared students for the future. Heather also noted the convenience of having a common curriculum across states. "Isn't it nice to be able to move somewhere and have your kid still where they're supposed to be and still in the curriculum and not lost or behind?"

Several participants liked the idea of a curriculum that covered less material but rather went into less material in a deeper manner without rushing from standard to standard. Kim explained, "The difference between Common Core and when we taught [previous state standards] is that you're allowed to go deeper into things, and not worry about every little standard because CCSS are a little overarching." Participants noted that in the past there were so many standards to be covered across the length of a year, it often felt like a race to instruct on all required standards and they felt like they were only able to cover them on a very surface level.

General Negative Reactions to CCSS

The most cited objection to CCSS from participants was that they at times questioned the developmental nature of the standards. Dana stated, "Some of the ways they are assessed and the standards I feel are not developmentally appropriate." In particular, teachers who had been teaching for several years argued that the standards required students to complete tasks that were at least a grade level above what they had previously been learning before the implementation of the standards. Nancy, who was in her 21st year of teaching, noted, "It's still primary, but now I feel like the curriculum has come down and we're more like a 3rd grade class used to be. Where they always said [students in 2nd grade] are learning to read, now in 2nd grade we are reading to learn." Some teachers questioned the knowledge of those who created CCSS in regards to developmental appropriateness. Kelly explained, "I'll be anxious to see how they change it and what's going to happen. And I hope they get some more people in there that are more knowledgeable about developmental milestones and what's appropriate for children and what's not; [someone] who knows what kids can handle and when the stress is just so hard for them."

Additionally, participants struggled with the misalignment of CCSS and mandated state tests. In one state studied, teachers were expected to begin teaching CCSS before standardized tests were aligned with those standards. In effect, although teachers were required to implement CCSS, students were mandated to take high stakes tests based on the previous standards. Also, teachers were evaluated in a high stakes manner based on the value-added impact of those test scores. Ali noted, there are "places that I have to do something different than what Common Core calls for. So, I would say I'm still teaching Common Core. I'm just trying to supplement those questions that might be on [the state standardized test]."

Particular Reading Issues

The following section demonstrates findings that were specific to English Language Arts. These include: emphasis on complex text, vocabulary, accountable talk, close reading, and text-based evidence.

Emphasis on Complex Text

Several participants saw more of an emphasis on complex text. In some cases, these texts were provided by the district. In others, teachers located and implemented their own materials. Participants discussed both the pros and cons of using complex text. For example, Sandy saw the complex text as often more engaging, but worried about the impact on her struggling readers. "The students are engaged and interested in the Common Core reading even though they have to have a lot of help from the teacher. If you use the texts that the curriculum map asks for, it is high interest for the kids. It is challenging for your high-risk kids. The teacher ends up reading a lot of it out loud to them."

Emphasis on Vocabulary

Participants noted an increased emphasis on vocabulary. Dana explained, "That's the word of the day- vocabulary, vocabulary, vocabulary." Some believed that since the implementation of CCSS they have shifted the way they teach vocabulary and that they are now teaching it in a more in-depth, engaging manner. While showing a photograph of a vocabulary lesson embedded within reading a text, Ali said, "They had to talk about the word camouflage because it showed up in all of their books. So, we needed a vocabulary lesson. This is really a big glorified exploration of a vocabulary word, where back before Common Core you would get a dictionary."

Emphasis on Accountable Talk

Participants noted an increased emphasis on accountable talk, a term which was new in itself for most. They explained that this talk involved more student-to-student dialogue and a decrease in "teacher talk." "They are supposed to turn, talk, and speak," Dana explained as she showed a photograph of students sitting at desks arranged in groups. "That's one reason the seats are designed like this because they are right by their partner." Participants agreed that this time for dialogue was greatly enjoyed by students. Nancy explained as she pointed to a photograph of students talking to one another, "One of the most important elements of Common Core is time for discussion and sharing ideas. They love it. You can see they love it in their little faces."

Emphasis on Close Reading and Text Based Evidence

"Refer to details and examples in a text" and "drawing on specific details in the text" (www.corestandards.org) is common language found in CCSS documents. Participants also noted that they have moved from spending large amounts of time building background information to digging more deeply into a complex text. Participants reported becoming more explicit about having students return to the text to find answers to comprehension questions rather than basing them more heavily on experience. Dana explained, "I am more intentional in some areas with text evidence. That's the biggest area I feel like I've grown in. What I'm trying to get them to do is find text evidence. I've always tried to do it, but I don't know that I was very good at it. That's been the big shift for me."

Implications

This study aligns with much of the previous research that points to the messy nature of policy mandates in schools. McGill-Franzen (2000) noted that the complex nature of teaching often results in unpredictable policy outcomes. Likewise, Spillane (1999) found that the amount of actual change in classroom practice as a result of policy mandates was variable and that instructional changes ranged from nonexistent to extreme. Coburn (2001) noted variability in implementation of policy, and Buehl and Fives (2009) posited that a teacher's willingness to embrace policy reform is almost always reliant on an individual's world-view and belief system. This study adds to this body of knowledge and indicates that teachers' beliefs lead them to often map previous practice onto new policy (Bloome et. al.,1989). This was indicated in participants' tendencies to fall back on previously implemented programs and trainings and naming them as CCSS. These tendencies are most likely increased by teachers' beliefs in "the bandwagon" nature of education which contributes to the doubt that any one policy or program will last long enough to really put in the time and effort to truly make the change.

This study also demonstrates that policy arguments playing out on the larger stage are often relevant to teachers. Participants not only felt that they do not have a say in policy that is implemented, they have a strong distrust in those who are creating said policy. The teachers we studied had little faith in those in power to create policy that truly was appropriate for their needs and their students' needs. As noted in *The Influence of Politics* section, teachers described their frustrations of being relegated to the "back of the room" and emphasized that "their opinions weren't respected" despite their years of education and years in the classroom. Teachers felt strongly that they had the insight and experience to provide important information to policy makers, but they felt that their voices went unheard. This aligns with Toll's (2001) study that demonstrated the varying discourse and viewpoints between teachers and policy makers. It adds to previous research by showing an unprecedented increase in the language of policy permeating the lives and language of practicing teachers.

Corburn et. al (2016) posited that for the first time in our history we are attempting to implement standards based and accountability-based reforms simultaneously. One important finding from our study was the melding and at times confusion as these two reforms came to fruition. For example, teachers blamed CCSS for accountability issues that were actually unrelated to the standards movement. Often our participants viewed CCSS as restrictive because of this focus on high stakes accountability measures which is in contrast to the statement in CCSS which notes that the standards do not define "how teachers should teach" (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of State School Officers, 2010).

Lastly, this study demonstrates positive instructional changes that are occurring because of CCSS implementation as well as alerts to potential issues that should be further researched. Increases in dialogue and specifically accountable talk as well as more authentic vocabulary instruction point to positive shifts. The increase of complex text must be further investigated. While our study demonstrated that these texts were of high interest to young readers, we must be careful that this focus does not lead to students only being exposed to frustrational level text.

References

Allington, R. (2002). What I've learned about effective reading instruction from a decade of studying exemplary classroom teachers. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *83*(10), 740-747.

Angrist, J. D., Cohodes, S. R., Dynarski, S. M., Pathak, P. A., Walters, C. R. (2016). Stand and deliver: Effects of Boston's charter high schools. Journal of Labor Economics, 34(2), 275–318.

Apple, M. W., & Jungck, S. (1990). "You don't have to be a teacher to teach this unit:" teaching, technology, and gender in the classroom. *American Educational Research Journal*, *27*(2), 227–251. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312027002227

Ball, M. & Smith, G. (1992). *Analyzing visual data.* London: Sage.

Bakhtin, M.M. (1981). The dialogic imagination, ed. By Michael Holquist, transc. By Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. *Austin: University of Texas Press, 263,* 14.

Bakhtin, M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. In C. Emerson, & M. Holquist. (Eds.), Austin, TX: University of Texas.

Barker, J., & Smith, F. (2012). What's in focus? A critical discussion of photography, children and young people. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, *15*(2), 91–103. https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2012.649406

Begum, S. (2012). A secondary science teacher's beliefs about environmental education and its relationship with the classroom practices. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Education*, *2*(1), 10-29.

Blommaert, J. (2005). *Discourse: A critical introduction*. Cambridge University Press.

Bloome, D. (2005). Introductions to studying language and literacy, in particular. In R. Beach, J. Green, M. Kamil, & T. Shanahan (Eds.), *Multidisciplinary perspective on literacy research* (pp. 275–292). Cresskill: Hampton Press.

Bloome, D., Carter, S. P., Christian, B. M., Otto, S., & Shuart-Faris, N. (2005). *Discourse analysis and the study of classroom language and literacy events*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Bloome, D., Puro, P., & Theodorou, E. (1989). Procedural display and classroom lessons. *Curriculum Inquiry*, *19*(3), 265-291.

Buehl, M. M., & Fives, H. (2009). Exploring teachers' beliefs about teaching knowledge: Where does it come from? Does it change? *The Journal of Experimental Education*, *77*(4), 367-407.

Calkins, L., Ehrenworth, M., & Lehman, C. (2012). *Pathways to the common core : Accelerating Achievement.* Portsmouth, NH : Heinemann.

Clark, C. M., & Peterson, P. L. (1986). Teachers' thought processes. In M.C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Teaching, 3* (p. 255-296). New York: Macmillan.

Cohen, D.K. (1990). A revolution in one classroom: The case of Mrs. Oublier. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,* 12(3), 311-329.

Coburn, C. E. (2001). Collective sensemaking about reading: How teachers mediate reading policy in their professional communities. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, *23*(2), 145-170.

Coburn, C.E., Hill, H.C., & Spillane, J.P. (2016). Alignment and accountability in policy design and implementation: The Common Core State Standards and implementation research. *Educational Researcher.* 45(4), 243-251.

Cochran-Smith, M., & Lytle, S. (1993). *Inside/outside: Teacher research and knowledge.* New York, NY: Teachers' College Press.

Collier, J., & Collier, M. (2009). *Visual anthropology: Photography as a research method*. University of New Mexico Press.

Common Core State Standards Initiative. (2010). Common core state standards (college and career-readiness standards and K-12 standards in English language arts and math). Washington, D.C. National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Cross, C. T. (2004). *Political education.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Eisenhart, M. A., Cuthbert, A. M., Shrum, J. L., & Harding, J. R. (2001). Teacher beliefs about their work activities: Policy implications. *Theory into Practice*, *27*(2), 137-144.

Epstein, I., Stevens, B., McKeever, P., & Baruchel, S. (2006). Photo elicitation interview (PEI): Using photos to elicit children's perspectives. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *5*(3), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690600500301

Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Routledge.

Feldman, A. (1994). *Teachers learning from teachers: Knowledge and understanding in collaborative action research* Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com/docview /62808757?accountid=10771

Freebody, F., Luke, A., & Gilbert, P. (1991). Reading positions and practices in the classroom. *Curriculum Inquiry,* 21*(4)*, 435-457.

Frey, N., & Fisher, D. (2013). *Rigorous reading: Five access points for comprehending complex texts.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Gee, J. P. (2014). *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. Routledge.

Glaser, B. S., & Strauss, A. (1971). *The discovery of grounded theory*. New York.

Grady, J. (2001). Becoming visual sociologist. *Sociological Imagination*, 38(1/2), 83-119).

Green, J. L., & Wallat, C. (1981). Mapping instructional conversations: A sociolinguistic ethnography. In J. L. Green, & C. Wallat (Eds.), *Ethnography and language in educational settings* (pp. 165-207). Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Guerra, P. L., & Nelson, S. W. (2009). Changing professional practice requires changing beliefs. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *90*(5), 354-359.

Gumperz, J. J. (1986). *Discourse strategies*. New York: Cambridge UP.

Haney, J. J., & McArthur, J. (2002). Four case studies of prospective science teachers' beliefs concerning constructivist teaching practices. *Science Education*, *86*(6), 783-802.

Harper, D. (2002). Talking about pictures: A case for photo elicitation. *Visual Studies*, *17*(1), 13–26. https://doi.org/10.1080/14725860220137345

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing qualitative research in education settings.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Henig, J. (2015). *The new education philanthropy: Politics, policy, and reform.* Harvard Education Press.

Hollingsworth, S. (1994). *Teacher Research and Urban Literacy Education: Lessons and conversations in a feminist key*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Holm, G. (2008). Photography as performance. *Qualitative Social Research* 9(2), 1-18.

Hughes, G. B., Daro, P., Holtzman, D., Middleton, K. (2013). A study of the alignment between the NAEP mathematics framework and the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics. Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.

Jenkins, S. & Agamba, J.J. (2013). The missing link in the CCSS initiative: Professional development for implementation. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal,* 17(2), 69-79.

Jennings, J. (2018). It's time to redefine the federal role in K-12 education. *Phi Delta Kappan, 100* (1), 8-14.

Lester, J.N. (2014). Discursive psychology: Methodology and applications. *Qualitative Psychology*, 1(2), 141-143.

Loveless, T. (2014). The 2014 Brown Center report on American education. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution.

McDonnell, L. M., & Weatherford, M. S. (2016). Recognizing the political in implementation research. *Educational Researcher*, *45*(4), 233–242. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x16649945

McGill-Franzen, A. (2000). Policy and instruction: What is the relationship? In M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, & R. Barr (Eds.), *Handbook of reading research volume III* [Kindle version]. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Nespor, J. (1987). The role of beliefs in the practice of teaching. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *19*(4), 317-328.

Ogan-Bekiroglue, F., & Akkoc, H. (2009). Preservice teachers' instructional beliefs and examination of consistency between beliefs and practices. *International Journal of Science and Mathematics Education*, *7*, 1173-1199.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation methods.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Polikoff, M.S. (2017). Is common core "working"? And where does common core research go from here? *AERA Open. Retrieved from: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2332858417691749*

Powers, S. W., Zippay, C., & Butler, B. (2006). Investigating connections between teacher beliefs and instructional practices with struggling readers. *Reading Horizons Journal*, *47*(2), 122-157.

Rasmussen, K. (2004). Places for children – children's places. *Childhood*, *11*(2), 155–173. https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568204043053

Richards, J. C., & Lockhart, C. (1994). *Reflective teaching in second language classroom.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Rogers, R. (Ed.). (2011). *An introduction to critical discourse analysis in education.* Routledge.

Roskos, K. & Neuman, S. (2013). Common core, commonplaces, and community in teaching reading. *The Reading Teacher,* 66(6), 469-473.

Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Smith, M.S., & O'Day, J.A. (1991). Systematic school reform. In S.H. Fuhrman & B. Malen (Eds.), *The politics of curriculum and testing: The 1990 yearbook of the Politics of Education Association* (pp. 233-267). New York, NY: Falmer Press.

Spillane, J. P. (1999). External reform initiatives and teachers' efforts to reconstruct their practice: The mediating role of teachers' zones of enactment. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, *31*(2), 143-175.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The ethnographic* interview. New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston.

Talbot, D. (2015). Teachers talk about their learning: a Bakhtinian analysis. *Knowledge Cultures, 3*(4), 171.

Taylor, S. (2004). Researching educational policy and change in 'new times': Using critical discourse analysis. *Journal of Education Policy, 19*(4), 433-451.

Tillema, H. & Orland-Barak, L. (2006). Constructing knowledge in professional conversations: The role of beliefs on knowledge and knowing. *Learning and Instruction,* 16, pp. 592-608.

Toll, C.A. (2001). Can teachers and policy makers learn to talk to one another? *The Reading Teacher, 55*(4), 318-325.

Tynjälä, P., Helle, L., Lonka, K., Murtonen, M., Mäkinen, J. and Olkinuora, E. (2001). 'A university studies perspective into the development of professional expertise', in Pantzar, E., Savolainen, R. and Tynjälä, P. (eds.), *In Search for a Human-Centered Information Society.* Tampere University Press, pp. 143-169.

Volosinov, V. (1929/1973). Marxism and the philosophy of language. L. Matejka & I. Titunik, (Trans.). New York, NY: Seminar Press.

Weiss, G., & Wodak, R. (Eds.). (2007). *Critical discourse analysis.* New York: Palgrave Macmillian.

Renee M.R. Moran is an associate professor of literacy at East Tennessee State University where she coordinates the Master's of Reading and Honors in Discipline Programs. Her research interests include the intersection of teacher decision making and policy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and the integration of science, literacy, and computation.

Huili Hong is a professor of the practice of Peabody College of Education at Vanderbilt University. Her teaching and research interests focus on languages and literacies as tools for students' equitable learning, free expression, imagination, and engagement with the world in critical, constructive, caring, and enjoyable ways.

Karin J. Keith is a Professor and Chair in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction in Clemmer College at East Tennessee State University. Her research interests include disciplinary literacy, literacy coaching, and reading comprehension.

Stacey Fisher is an associate professor of literacy at East Tennessee State University where she serves as co-coordinator for the K-5 Elementary Education Program. Her research interests focus on family literacy and financial literacy/personal finance for rural, first-generation college students and non-traditional students.

LaShay Wood is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at East Tennessee State University where she serves as middle grades coordinator. Her research interests focus on the integration of science and literacy in Appalachia and the impact of literacy policy on teachers.