EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By Christine Anne Hipsher

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

February, 2014

EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By Christine Anne Hipsher

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

February, 2014

APPROVED BY:

Billie Jean Holubz, Ed.D., Committee Chair

Frederick A. Milacci, Ed.D., Committee Member

Ansley Daniel, Ph.D., Committee Member

Scott B. Watson, Ph.D., Associate Dean, Advanced Programs

EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the impact of the implementation of the

Common Core State Standards in Georgia K-12 on the professional development needs of

educators. Across the United States the enactment of a Common Core State Standards went into

effect. The primary goal of the Common Core State Standards movement was to clarify

standards. Accordingly, this study reviewed Social Learning Theory and Constructivism. The

research questions in this study examined the types of support educators requested. The research

conducted in this multiple case study analyzed teachers' perceptions about the implementation of

the CCSS and effective professional development practices. Data was collected over a period of

a couple months, and transcripts of interviews, focus groups, and reflective journals were

analyzed using theme analysis. The overarching themes identified in the study included the

frustration that educators felt throughout the implementation year, and the additional support

they would like to receive. Recommendations for effective professional development practices

included the incorporation of technological resources, opportunities for professional

collaboration, respectful use of educators' time, a home school connection, inclusion of all staff

working with students in professional development, and a focus on supporting students

academically. All information shared with educators was expected to be organized and relevant.

The results of this study indicated a need for additional professional development instruction and

research.

Keywords: Common Core State Standards, professional development, rigor, relevance,

objectives, perception, Social Learning Theory, Constructivism

Dedication & Acknowledgements

What an incredible journey this has been! The last few years have been full of emotion and determination. I am so grateful for the opportunity to pursue my Doctorate of Education at Liberty University. Through faith, love and commitment I understand that this accomplishment has been possible. It is through the love of my family and my faith that this accomplishment can be realized. "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails" (I Corinthians 13:4–8a, NIV).

The first person I think of to thank is of course my husband, Andy. His dedication to our success is ever-present in our lives. His support of my education and love for me has been one of the main reasons I could take the time to pursue such a fantastic goal. Throughout the last several years, we have run a business together, raised two amazing daughters, and faced many challenges head on. I look forward to the next chapter. Thank you for your love, humor and support. I will always appreciate your pursuit of a successful and happy future for our family.

My beautiful, smart Andrea has always inspired me! Andrea's love of learning, reading, and literary skill has always encouraged me. What a gift you have been in my life, always learning, growing, and inspiring me intellectually. I am forever grateful for your humor and encouragement. You are such a bright light in my life. Wonderful opportunities are on the horizon for you. I am looking forward to seeing you excel in all you do.

Victoria Grace, you are a joy! You have given me the peace and inspiration to keep going even in the face of very challenging times. I have always been able to share my hopes and dreams with you, and you have brought a sense of purpose and peace to me. Thank you for all

your energy, effort, and conversation. The world awaits your gifts! I am so proud of you.

My dear friend, Carolyn, you have been so supportive of me. I cannot imagine going through the last several years without your friendship and guidance. Every time I speak to you, I smile, and you bring me so much positive energy and inspiration. I appreciate you more than you will ever know. I am looking forward to whatever projects we take on together in the future.

Mom and Dad, I want to express my appreciation for all of the opportunities you provided me growing up. My love for learning and pursuit of my educational goals were fueled by my experiences at The Galloway School, Berry College, and Oglethorpe University. I will be forever grateful for your commitment to my education and your willingness to provide such wonderful educational opportunities to me, which have encouraged me every day to be a lifelong learner. I love you.

I am so appreciative of my administration. Dr. Moore and Mrs. Cole were a source of encouragement, and provided me with support throughout this challenging process. I am so grateful for their willingness to support my research as I reached out to principals and our school district. I know that without that support, this process would have been much more difficult. I am so grateful to have the opportunity to work and grow professionally at such a wonderful school.

I knew from the beginning of my qualitative research class, Dr. Holubz was a source of knowledge and support for me. I know her communication and time was always above and beyond. I am so appreciative of the time I was able to work closely with her. Dr. Frederick Milacci, Dr. Michael Hixon and Dr. Ansley Daniels have been a wealth of knowledge and support. I cannot imagine a better team to help guide me through this process.

I am looking forward to the future, and I know my time at Liberty University and work in

the dissertation process will always be important to reflect upon, both professionally and

personally. I have to say it again, what a wonderful journey this has been.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

Bring Your Own Device; technology initiative (BYOD)

Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT)

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

Common Core Standards (CCS)

Department of Education (DOE)

Georgia Performance Standards (GPS)

Early Intervention Program (EIP)

English Second Language Learner (ESOL)

English Language Learners (ELL)

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)

National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT)

Teacher edition of textbook (TE)

Quality Core Curriculum (QCC)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background

In this study, I addressed select educators' perceptions regarding effective professional development practices. The implementation of the Common Core State Standards indicated a potential adjustment for all educators across the state of Georgia as systems shifted from the Georgia Performance Standards to the Common Core State Standards. The research within this study is important in extending the body of knowledge on effective professional development practices in relation to the Common Core State Standards. I specifically studied educators who were successfully implementing the curriculum change to the Common Core State Standards. According to Tienkin (2010), "Evidence-based or data driven decision making has been at the forefront of education rhetoric for the past 15 years" (p. 2). Findings within this study are applicable to other school systems across the state and country.

The adoption of the Common Core State Standards as a national movement was intended to unify learning objectives nationally. Historically, states have functioned independently of each other in regards to curriculum planning. In an effort to improve students' success nationally and America's competitive edge globally, examining and reevaluating the need for a national core curriculum became necessary. According to Kern (2011),

> The George H. W. Bush administration initiated the notion of the U.S. national academic standards in 1989; the Clinton administration's education policymaking continued the pendulum swing toward national standards; then the George W. Bush administration's No Child Left Behind Act caused the pendulum to swing so far away from a national consensus that by 2004 both conservatives and progressives agreed to examine national standards as a way to improve student achievement in American schools. (p. 90)

States, under the direction of their individual constitutions, have the authority to implement curriculum and educational programs independently of each other. Unity of educational programs was needed as a method of increasing student achievement, college preparedness and career readiness (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). The Common Core State Standards were designed to improve students' preparation for both college and a career. According to Griffith (2011), educators must be equipped to implement the standards effectively with students. Unification of educational goals from state to state has the potential to improve both educational objectives, communication among educators, and student achievement (Phillips & Wong, 2010).

Past research findings indicated a need to examine effective and practical ways to guide educators through the implementation process of the new standards and professional development programs. According to Porter et al. (2011), the Common Core State Standards are an effort to unify academic guidelines across the United States, especially in the language arts and math. Investigation of ways to guide educators through this process is important in making this shift smoother for educators. Sweeping changes across the curriculum are intended to increase relevance and rigor within the curriculum. The implementation of the new standards has potential to increase real world problem solving skills for students. Additionally, the standards have application for students beyond the classroom.

My goal was to benefit educators within the district. In addition, my research findings show application to other districts nationally. The present findings could indicate a path to including a forum for sharing instructional ideals, professional development programs, and materials via professional learning communities and the Internet. While much research has been done regarding the development of the standards, little research is currently available on the implementation of the Standards in each state or how information has been disseminated

throughout different educational systems. I sought to fill the current gap by conducting research regarding the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and professional development.

Teachers constantly work toward developing themselves professionally. According to Chalmers and Keown (2006), professional development involves individual teachers evaluating and applying the knowledge they know to be purposeful for their students. Evaluating the impact of the new standards regarding these aspects of teacher development was important. The process of participating in this study allowed teachers to be a part of research regarding the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and contribute to the body of research that existed on effective professional development practices.

Teacher perceptions and attitudes also play an integral role implementing the new standards, and are the primary impetus for change. Ediger (2011) emphasized that educators must have a positive attitude toward the curriculum shift in order to adequately meet the needs of students. My close examination of teacher perceptions about effective practices would help guide districts' decisions as to what professional development programs are meaningful and worthwhile to educators, while implementing the Common Core State Standards.

Situation to Self

In an effort to better serve the students whom I teach and the professionals whom I train, I have an interest in the process of learning from a constructivist viewpoint. Individuals scaffold learning through shared experiences and collaboration (Ash, 2011). As the field of education is ever evolving, continuing to study how students learn and how to prepare educators to meet the needs of the diverse learners in their classrooms is essential. Research related to effective professional development formats and instruction is crucial in meeting the needs of educators.

The implementation of the Common Core State Standards is an event that has impacted all educators in Georgia. The need for teachers to understand the new standards and improve instructional practices indicates that the implementation of these standards is a relevant topic for research. The connection between my interests in the implementation Common Core State Standards and effective professional development fully aligned with this study.

Problem Statement

Current Common Core State Standards research indicates that two problems are present (Bomer & Maloch, 2011). Because the Common Core State Standards are new across the nation and require specific instructional skills and strategies to reach the depth of knowledge appropriate for students, training for teachers is crucial. Griffith (2011) explained that teachers must be prepared to implement the standards effectively in their classrooms and make the standards applicable for students in the real world. Research was necessary to ascertain whether or not teachers felt that they were equipped to implement Common Core Standards. If teachers felt that additional training and/or support was needed in implementing Common Core Standards, the type of professional development opportunities educators sought raised another vital issue. Opportunities and environments for collaboration among teams, schools, districts, and states within the nation would be a goal for the field of education in general. According to Conley (2011), educators had the opportunity to analyze and evaluate the components of the standards and the value the standards would have for students. An effort to coordinate the perceived needs of educators had potential to lead to the encouragement of best professional development practices, collaboration and increased student achievement.

Purpose Statement

The implementation of the Common Core State Standards during the 2012-2013

academic school year impacted educators across the country as well as their need for professional development (Marcoux, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand the perceptions select educators had toward professional development in relationship to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in Georgia (Phillips & Wong, 2010). The implementation of the Common Core State Standards indicated specific professional development needs of educators within this system based on the data collected from participants. I examined the educators' perceptions regarding effective professional development practices and investigated the best practices and collaboration techniques through a constructivist viewpoint. I sought to shed light on the perceptions educators had in regards to the professional development opportunities during the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (Creswell, 2007).

Significance of the Study

Findings of this study indicated valuable information for the district about methods of professional development for educators within the district. The implementation of the standards statewide made professional development an important issue. A great deal of research had been conducted on professional development (Beach, 2011); however, no significant research existed on professional development practices specifically related to the Common Core State Standards. Researchers had addressed effective professional development practices rather than addressing how to handle the challenge of a curriculum shift by 45 of the 50 states in the nation (Phillips & Wong, 2010). According to Anderson (2011) adult learners are professionals who are responsible for developing a culture of lifelong learning. I addressed the concerns educators had regarding the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards in an effort to aid in the development of effective professional development practices.

17

Research Questions

The following three questions were explored in the study:

Research Question One

What, if any, support did educators request in regards to the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards?

Educators needed a voice in the process of developing professional development programs in order to ensure the perceived needs of teachers were being met (Lewin, 2010). I worked to identify the means of support that educators may have wanted.

Research Question Two

What, if any, reactions did educators have in regards to the curriculum shift from the Georgia Performance Standards to the Common Core State Standards?

Implementation of the Common Core State Standards was a complex endeavor incorporating the time and talents of a vast group of educators and administrators. An understanding of the concerns that educators face allows for thoughtful planning. Phillips and Wong (2010) note that "[t]he Common Core will become useful to teachers and policy makers only when it is part of a larger system of next generation assessments that track how much students know and how well they know it" (p. 39). Addressing the concerns of educators allowed this study to show insight into needs for professional development.

Research Question Three

What, if any, methods would educators like to utilize in order to collaborate and share resources?

The manner in which educators share information within the district aids in the unification of these educators regarding a common goal. The foundation of collaboration is

based on effective professional development practices.

Research Plan

The study was a qualitative multiple case study conducted by collecting and synthesizing responses from 14 teachers who taught in both regular and special education classrooms. The teachers selected to participate in the study were teaching in classrooms representative of others within district A. District A represents a large suburban metropolitan school system in Atlanta, Georgia. According to Yin (2009), case study is used to contribute to the body of knowledge in a group or an organization. A case study was determined to be a suitable research design for this study.

Reflective journaling was utilized in this research. Participants in the study from both non-Title I and Title I schools kept an electronic journal on their computers. Participants recorded in the form of journal entries their reflections and thoughts on topics related to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Teachers needed to feel comfortable to experiment with instructional strategies, reflect and refine instructional practices to best meet the needs of their students (Chalmers & Keown, 2006). Journaling allowed educators to privately record observations they had during data collection.

Focus groups were incorporated into the data collection procedures. Focus groups were a form of interviewing, and the communication between participants allowed for the collection of information from multiple participants at one time. The participants had the opportunity to discuss and exchange ideas during the interview session. The participants from the focus groups were all intermediate elementary educators working in grades two through five. Participants were selected based on specific participation criteria, which are outlined in Chapter Three. All communication was recorded and transcribed. According to Yin (2009), focus groups are an

effective way to explore individuals' knowledge on a topic and why they feel that way.

Educators nationally were focused on the common goal of positively influencing students and

guiding them toward their academic goals (Williams, Tabernick, & Krivak, 2009). Focus groups

allowed participants to collaboratively share their viewpoints on topics related to the Common

Core State Standards.

Field interviews were also conducted so that participants had ample opportunity to

personally share ideas, concerns, and resources relating to instruction at their content level. The

focus of the study was the perceived professional development needs of educators in District A

in relationship to the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards. The

conclusions of the study were based on theme analysis of results from journals, field interviews,

and focus groups. All of the results were reported in the study and were communicated to the

district for planning purposes.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

The educators who participated in the study were all teachers in District A. All of the

teachers that participated in this study received similar professional development training within

the district. Additionally, participants are both regular classroom teachers and special education

teachers. The participating teachers went through a selection process in District A and were

required to be effectively implementing the Common Core State Standards in their classrooms.

To be eligible to participate in the study, teachers must have had at least five years of teaching

experience in Georgia during which time they implemented the Georgia Performance Standards

and Common Core State Standards. The group of schools in this district included varied

demographic and socioeconomic levels. I did not conduct any research within my own school,

or with colleagues with whom I work or for whom I supervise. The course of the study was

limited to the initial year of implementation of the new standards because the most representative

perceived professional development needs of educators was expected to occur during this period

of adjustment (Mathis, 2010).

Limitations

One possible limitation of the study was the influence that other factors could have posed

in the responses made by educators. I emphasized to the participants that there were no correct

responses, and information gathering was for analytical purposes only. The participants were

required to spend several sessions working with me. Educators participating in the study

voluntarily shared information and their time. Responses provided from the participants in

journals, focus groups, or interviews did not influence the educators' performance evaluations.

The geographical location may have been a limitation regarding transferability of results.

The findings may not be as applicable in a rural or urban setting based on the needs of student

populations specific to these location types. The study was open to individuals of both genders.

Participants included 2 males and 12 females. Yin (2009) contended that it is important that

researchers integrate real world events in data collection which participants did not have control

over. This lack of control was an additional limitation in using a multiple case study design.

<div align="center">

Summary

</div>

The purpose of this multiple case study was to examine teachers' perceptions in regards

to professional development and the implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Constructivism and Social Learning Theory served as the theoretical foundation for the study.

Educators stated they needed to have valuable resources and training as they began the process

of implementing the new Common Core State Standards in order to positively impact students

and increase student achievement. Educators were an integral part of the process and current

research. Therefore, a qualitative multiple case study allowed for the analysis of themes and patterns to be evaluated in relationship to participant perspectives on professional development and the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Yin (2009) stated that a case study addressed many forms of evidence which could include artifacts, interviews, documents and observations. I worked to provide useful results based on the method of qualitative research and theme analysis. I specifically sought to determine if educators required additional support with implementing the standards, what reactions educators had in regards to implementing the Common Core State Standards, and what methods educators preferred in order to collaborate with each other. The following literature review shows the current research on effective professional development practices as well as the development of the Common Core State Standards.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

According to Ash (2011), the Common Core State Standards are a set of internationally benchmarked learning objectives intended to better prepare students for college or a career. The implementation of the Common Core State Standards in Georgia schools during the 2012-2013 school year had the potential to be a significant undertaking for educators. A gap in the literature indicated a need for professional development for educators. According to Conley (2011), an implied goal of the standards is to increase expectations for student performance as well as the development of common national assessments. Specifically, to express to teachers what the goals of the standards and assessments were. Additionally, an important goal is to challenge American students to remain competitive with other school systems globally.

A need existed to evaluate the impact of the Common Core State Standards on student progress, students' mastery of objectives, and development of future assessments. Conley (2011) states that the Common Core State Standards are intended to be a rigorous, sequential, and increasingly complex set of internationally benchmarked learning objectives. A goal of the new standards is to identify the common skills and concepts that all students should understand and be able to do (Finkelstein et al., 2013).

Nationally, educators encountered a lack of information on effective professional development and communication practices. Bomer and Maloch (2011) contend that educators are aware that the Common Core State Standards have dramatically changed what they are required to teach and what students must be able to do by the end of each academic year. Educators have to develop new and effective means to share and develop effective instruction as well as strategies to share with new teachers best practices (Cogan, Schmidt, & Houang, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

Conley's (2011) research indicated that greater attention is paid to the cognitive process of how students learn and process information. For example, Constructivism and Social Learning Theory are mentioned throughout research and are relevant because they indicate how individuals construct knowledge (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012). Regarding Constructivism, Porter et al. (2011) explained social constructs that show how students acquire new information as opportunities to collaborate with each other and best connect to relevance in their daily lives. Bandura, Watson, Freud and Vygotsky are leading theorists in the field of Social Learning Theory (Miller, 2011). Regarding Social Learning Theory, Miller (2011) stated that social learning theorists emphasize how students construct knowledge and scaffold new learning on what they already understand about the world based on their experiences. Altogether, these theories are relevant to investigating Common Core State Standards implementation because the new standards not only focus on what is taught, but also on how educators teach and accommodate the cognitive development of students (Fosnot, 2005).

Constructivism provided the theoretical basis for this study, as it is a framework for how students learn and process information. Anderson (2011) states, "Vygotsky's (1986) framework for guided participation provides a structured learning environment in which the learner is initially supported using a 'scaffolding' framework" (p. 49). Vygotsky emphasizes the role of the teachers, which is applicable to adult learners (Anderson, 2011). Vygotsky's scaffolding framework ensures that the learning taking place has future value for students to build new knowledge. Vygotsky's perspective of constructivism has an emphasis on logical thinking and purposeful application of knowledge (Anderson, 2011). Focus on the process in which adults learn is also an important perspective as consideration was given to how best implement the new

standards (Anderson, 2011). Vygotsky (as cited in Miller, 2011) concluded that cognitive

growth is a result of interaction with other members of society through a progression of leveled

instruction. In a constructivist environment, every member is responsible for his or her own

learning and for supporting the learning of others (Anderson, 2011).

The sociocultural and constructivist approaches to learning have also been emphasized in

research (i.e., Miller, 2011). For instance, Miller states that teaching and learning must take into

account the child's zone of proximal development. Miller's (2011) statement indicates that both

child and adult students are influenced by the environment in which they learn. The

development of learning environments that support the scaffolding of knowledge will allow for

students to internalize and apply new skills (Miller, 2011). Research has indicated that the

implementation of the new Common Core State Standards is a complicated process involving

staff development, assessment redesign, and resource adoption (Conley, 2011). Not only do

educators reflect on what students are learning with the new standards, but they will examine

how they learn (Conley, 2011). Sociocultural Theory indicates an understanding that individuals

learn by making connections relating to their experiences and cultural influences (Miller, 2011).

According to Porter et al. (2011), The Common Core State Standards are precise in the

requirements for students in both math and language arts. The Common Core State Standards

(Heiten, 2013) are specific to what students should learn and how they will demonstrate

proficiency of their understanding.

Historical Background

The origin of the Common Core State Standards movement is rooted in the desire to

reform educational practices in the United States (Calkins et al., 2012). Historically, there has

been a push to develop a national curriculum. For example, in 1959 Dwight Eisenhower worked

25

to establish a national set of learning standards. However, the implementation of a national curriculum is considered by some to be a threat to states' rights, and in turn can be considered unconstitutional (Ginn, 2010). The responsibility has fallen on the states to align their academic objectives and to determine a core curriculum that will enable American students to be globally competitive (Porter et al., 2011). The Common Core of Academic Standards is identified as skills that are "Real world reflecting the knowledge and skills that our young people need for success in college and careers" (Bray, 2011, p. 6). The need for American children to be globally competitive has ignited an academic push for these children to catch up with their international peers (Tienken, 2010).

Despite this academic push, the underlying assumptions of current research indicate that American children have fallen behind in their level of preparedness for both college and career (Tienken, 2010). According to Kern (2011), both conservatives and progressives were motivated to explore the use of a set of national standards as a means of improving American students' performance academically. The root of the Common Core State Standards' historical development had grown out of presidential administrations' legislations over the last century to reform educational practices. In an effort to benefit this development, "Race to the Top" initiatives are a driving force behind the development of the new curriculum (Porter et al., 2011). According to Porter et al. (2011), the Common Core State Standards are a state driven effort to unify academic performance expectations for students K-12.

College and Career Readiness

Not all students are suited for a college experience. According to Griffith (2010), college and career readiness is identified as the ability to succeed as college freshman or entry level job positions. The Common Core State Standards also include standards that are essential for career

readiness (Calkins et al., 2012). Not only do citizens of the United States need to be academically sound, but they also need to have the communication and reasoning skills to be an effective member of the work force (Bray, 2011). The primary objectives of the new standards are on problem solving and real world skills which give students the relevance they need for increased academic performance and understanding (Ginn, 2011). Research findings indicate that increased rigor is one of these objectives (Conley, 2011; Riddile, 2012). Researchers have also analyzed gaps within curriculum (Bomer & Maloch, 2011). Further, Calkins et al. (2012) identify increased text complexity and problem solving opportunities as essential components of effective standards.

The four key factors identified in the Common Core State Standards include the following:

> (1) Set standards high enough to inspire and reflect on our nation's ambitions for students' achievement. (2) Provide a coherent and conceptual framework, beyond policy documents, to give work credibility. (3) Establish a research base for the standards. (4) Build opportunities for input from teachers. (Kern, 2011, p. 90)

The pendulum is always swinging in education, and standard practice is always subject to change. However, the core principles of the standards outlined are constant throughout the research.

While there are numerous benefits to the standards' implementation, there are also challenges that exist with the implementation of the new standards. For instance, Bomer and Maloch (2011) state that the implementation of the Common Core State Standards will equalize regional and socioeconomic differences for students. Additionally, challenges exist regarding the development of the standards and the evidence that may or may not exist in their defense.

27

Bomer and Maloch (2011) assert that teachers understand that there is a great deal to learn about implementing the new standards. Educators need to proceed with caution as they enter this new world of curriculum implementation. Heiten (2013) adds that, according to the Gates Foundation Survey (2013), more than three quarters of elementary teachers were enthusiastic about the Common Core State Standards. There is still professional development work that needs to be accomplished in order to achieve the lofty goals of the standards.

Research findings indicate common themes presenting potential challenges, including increased problem solving skills, rigor, and real world applications of knowledge (Riddile, 2012). Research has further indicated that meeting the needs of subpopulations of students is another existing challenge. Daggett and Gendron (2010) identify subpopulations of students as groups with unique needs and typically below-average performance (2010). Students with impoverished lifestyles and students with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) need great attention in order to decrease the achievement gap that exists. Additionally, gifted students have been seen as the competitive future of the American economy, though these students are another subgroup that needs proper guidance in order to develop their skills and strengths and to demonstrate leadership (Griffith, 2011). The subgroup of special education students with an IEP also requires special considerations with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Kaufman and Ring (2011) stated that educators should utilize "Scaffold instruction as necessary, but avoid providing unneeded assistance" (p.54). The Common Core State Standards are intended to give students the real world skills they need to be competitive in a global economy. Veteran as well as new teachers have a great deal to learn about the implementation of this complex set of academic standards with students, and reading instruction (Heibert, 2012). Educators in turn needed extensive support with this transition to the Common Core State

Standards.

Decisions regarding the effectiveness of the standards are evaluated based on nationally standardized assessments such as the American College Testing (ACT) and the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). Additionally, there will be new assessments designed that can be used nationally to measure both student achievement and college readiness, such as the PARRC assessment currently under development (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers [PARRC], 2012). Many standardized assessments are used to measure student achievement and college readiness. Overall, research indicates that the gap both internationally and among subgroups is vast (Gilroy, 2011). Further research will provide valuable information on the content areas that need additional focus (Gilroy, 2011).

Another factor in the new standards mentioned throughout the research is increased rigor (i.e., Riddile, 2012). For instance, Riddile (2012) indicated that a rigor matrix is used to determine student proficiency across the curriculum based on the levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Riddile, (2012) explained that understanding how students process information is essential. Professional development provides an opportunity for educators to learn more about meeting the needs of students. Additionally, Conley (2011) defined rigor as an acceleration of content and performance expectations. Finally, Porter et al. (2011) asserted that students are expected to increase problem solving skills and exhibit real world application of content that they are learning in the classroom. Increased rigor appeared to be a common goal of researchers in relation to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Educational reform and increased student achievement takes time to implement. According to Conley (2011), through the process of careful planning, educators will better prepare a greater number of students for both college and career by focusing on a common set of

educational principles. Conley (2011) outlined the overarching principles, including engaging students in instruction, offering challenging opportunities, Socratic questioning techniques, problem solving, increasing text analysis, and improving writing skills. According to Conley (2011), the brain is an amazing organ that can constantly refine, gain, and sort knowledge into useful categories of information. The Common Core Standards are designed to challenge and develop higher order thinking skills (Conley, 2011). The science behind the development of the specific core standards entails building and relating schema through the use of mathematics and language arts content.

Conley (2011) identified five key cognitive strategies that determine if a student is prepared for either college or a career. He asserted that problem formation, in which individuals generate hypotheses and reflect before solving a problem, is a key skill for students or employees. Also, he contended that the abilities to research, interpret information, and communicate effectively are crucial skills for individuals to master in order to be effective and productive members of society. Conley (2011) indicated that due to the challenging nature of the new curriculum, students demonstrated improved problem solving skills. The goal of the new standards is to better prepare individuals for higher education, the work force, and international competition through improving these key strategies (Kern, 2011).

Approaches to Professional Development for Educators

Conley (2011) explored the readiness of states to take on the challenge of implementing the new curriculum. Educating teachers and administrators about the new standards is a daunting task; however, this effort has been embraced by 45 out of 50 states (Ginn, 2010). Professional development is as crucial component of both the acceptance and effectiveness of the standards implementation (Guskey, 2002). Collaboration through technology is reported as a means for

educators to support each other through the transition. Ash's (2011) findings indicate that innovative online resources such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and Four Square should be utilized for educators to post and share effective instructional methods and lessons.

The Common Core State Standards are clear in design, have central goals, and are few in number (Calkins et al., 2012). Educators face the challenge of consistency across grade levels and disciplines as intellectual development occurs over time and across all subjects in the curriculum (Calkins et al., 2012). The process of breaking down the standards in both content and practice will allow educators the opportunity to reflect on best practices. According to Conley (2011), schools should embrace the process and opportunity to redesign curriculum and engage students in challenging and relevant academic tasks. The change in curriculum was inevitable, and investigation into how educators manage the change is crucial. The Common Core is here to stay, and it is designed to accomplish the goal of equalizing the curriculum and expectations for all American students (Locke, 2012).

Professional development in relationship to the development of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is the next important step once the standards are implemented. According to Ash (2011), as educators become more familiar with the CCSS, more technological and print resources will become available. Educators' attitudes and viewpoints about professional development is a key component related to the types of opportunities offered to teachers. Ash (2011) further stated that currently the focus of educators has been on the development of curriculum materials, and the next stage will be professional development. The need for unity and alignment among schools, states, and systems is a driving force in the development of innovative ways to connect these individuals and organizations. Examples of creative professional development opportunities include Common Core 360, which includes video clips,

mobile applications, and social media sites all with the objective of aligning and planning the instruction for the standards (School Improvement Network, 2011). Collaboration is a reoccurring theme presented in the research. Kaufman and Ring (2011), believe that this was positive for collaboration results because a variety of opportunities and resources inspired educators. Nagel (2013) asserted in regards to effective professional development, it should be a process conducted over a period of time rather than in one day workshops. Additionally, mentoring and coaching methods are considered the most effective manner of disseminating new information to educators.

Implications for the Implementation of the Common Core

According to Joyce and Showers (2011), the 'pathway' for the implementation of the Common Core State Standards must include a thorough understanding of the standards, an available resource bank, and teacher participation. Teachers must be invested in the professional development being offered, which is why evaluating effective professional development practices is essential (Joyce & Showers, 2011). Collaboration among both students and educators is identified as an essential component of professional development. Teachers must receive guidance in both what the standards encompass and effective teaching strategies (Conley, 2011). Ash (2011) reported that a weakness in the educational system is a lack of opportunities for educators to share resources and collaborate. My study serves to provide information on student achievement and teacher collaboration. In an attempt to fill the gaps and increase continuity among schools, districts, states, nationally and internationally, educators are faced with the task of how to teach and share with each other the best practices available (Herbert & Rubin, 2012).

In essence, research indicates that there is a need for professional development and

collaboration. Cooper (2002) stated that professional development should focus on the needs

and prior knowledge of educators, with the primary objective being the improvement of student

achievement. Effective means for educators to support each other through the process allowed

for the sharing of resources and the probability of increased quality of student performance

(Joyce & Showers, 2011). Bray (2011) asserts that it is important to understand that there are

multiple ways for students to accomplish the goals of the standards. The need for effective

means of instruction and professional development opportunities is crucial.

    The curriculum shift is best seen as an opportunity to both unify standards nationally as

well as unify educators for the common goal of benefiting students (Calkins et al., 2012).

Cooper (2002) identified professional development as all categories of training, including in-

services, workshops, staff development, and individual professional development. Professional

development is an essential element for educators in allowing them the opportunity to share ideas

and hone their instructional skills. Kern (2011) stated, the Common Core State Standards were

crucial for bringing about real progress and change within the educational system that will

benefit all students. The curriculum shift overall gives educators a common purpose and plan for

their instruction.

    Professional development can take on many forms, including collaboration among teams,

mentoring, whole group staff development, district and online methods for communication.

Goals of effective professional development include the use of quality materials, modeling, and

relevant instruction (Williams et al., 2009). Educators must also collaborate not only on

instructional techniques, but assessment methods. According to Ash, the implementation of the

Common Core State Standards is a rich opportunity to collaborate across states, and develop

instructional materials and common assessments. Educators must implement technological tools

and a professional willingness to communicate with each other to share resources and ideas. Gilles, Wang, Smith, and Johnson (2013) further explain that professional development training should focus on literacy skills across the curriculum with all educators that work with students.

Research indicates that adopting the standards is considered an easy step in the process, whereas nationally implementing the standards will be a challenging step (Ginn, 2010). Ginn (2010) asserted that the implementation of the new standards will take several years, and will involve professional development as well as new student resources. The curriculum change is an important shift in thinking of educators needing to have a more focused and defined educational plan to meet the needs of students. The alignment of state standards across the nation will pose considerable challenges as school systems work to develop common assessments that are nationally normed and to adopt textbook materials that are applicable (Porter et al., 2011). Gulamhussein (2013) added that professional development cannot just be about surface knowledge or exposing teachers to one shot opportunities for information, but it must be ongoing and provide opportunities for support and resources.

Professional development is the cornerstone of an effective curriculum shift. The alignment of states, districts, and individual schools' goals was a daunting task. According to Guskey (2002), proper attention to detail, planning and organization are essential for effective professional development practices. The implementation process of the new standards was met with a critical eye from educators. Tienken (2010) further asserted that education has become increasingly data driven, and professional development should not only focus on educator training, but on administrator training as well. A gap in the literature has indicated the need for evidence of effective professional development practices. Williams et al. (2009) indicated that there is a need for designing and implementing professional development that further develops

the content knowledge and teaching strategies associated with the Common Core Curriculum.

Implications for Common Core State Standards Instruction

Professional development is the foundation for implementing Common Core instruction. According to Riddile (2012), "Teachers have to know and understand what motivates students" (p. 41). The instruction of the new standards requires a combination of approaches such as guided groups, whole class, and individualized instruction. Educators will need resources and materials in order be prepared for this instruction. Additionally, teachers have to have the freedom and authority to make decisions in their classrooms. Owocki (2012) advised that educators understand that they have the authority to interpret the standards and go beyond in order to push students to excellence. She further asserted that educators should push students for excellence. Differentiated instruction would allow educators to meet the individual levels of all student ability levels and subgroups. Assessment of students' needs and ability levels will be an on-going process for teachers (Owocki, 2012).

Effective classrooms are defined as ones that have a foundation of literacy-based instruction using a variety of text genres. Increased time during language blocks would be necessary for reading and writing instruction and practice (Cunningham & Allington, 2011). Literacy instruction emphasizes meaningful methods of communication. Teaching tasks should be meaningful across the curriculum and involve a connection to reading and writing instruction (Owocki, 2012). Educators should plan for opportunities for both explicit instruction and opportunities for student practice, collaboration and sharing. Science and social studies instruction still play an important role in the school day, but are an integrated part of the language arts instruction (Cunningham & Allington, 2011).

Cognitive strategy themes in language arts included students' abilities to complete

complex tasks. Conley (2011) indicated that educators should carefully analyze the interactions of individuals, and utilize a variety of mediums to present information including multimedia and visuals. In addition, students are expected to incorporate technology as an integral part of the classroom. Mathematics instruction would combine increased rigor, problem solving, conferencing, and verbalization of understanding by students. Ediger (2011) asserted that learning experiences should be planned based on best practices and research-based activities to create an optimal learning environment. The emphasis in mathematics instruction involves an increased depth of instruction with fewer standards, focusing on student mastery or skills and real world applications of the components of standards. Riddile (2012) highlighted that the Common Core State Standards focus on problem skills, increased rigor and students' abilities to verbalize their learning. The goal of the Common Core State standards is not for students to learn information for a finite period of time, but rather to have the ability to apply their understanding in preparation for college and career purposes (Ginn, 2010). Riddile (2012) asserts that students would have a greater understanding of academic concepts in all subject areas across the curriculum. Students need a safe and structured environment to put into practice the Common Core State Standards.

The standards outlined for mathematical practice include the expectation that all students should reason quantitatively and abstractly. Students should construct mathematical arguments and regularly critique the work of their peers (Conley, 2011). Additionally, students are expected to model in mathematics and express their understanding and reasoning verbally and in writing (Conley, 2011). Students are expected to perform abstractly and not just accurately demonstrate computation skills.

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which the implementation of the

Common Core curriculum influences the professional development needs of educators in

Georgia. Literature has indicated a need for the further investigation of professional

development opportunities and teacher viewpoints associated with the curriculum shift. Riddile

(2012) states that students must be able to defend their thinking and debate with classmates in an

educational environment in which risk-taking is encouraged. Educators need to reframe their

thinking in many cases regarding their approach to traditional instruction and be given the tools

and resources to meet the needs of their students (Weiner, 2013).

Professional Development Needs

The implementation of the Common Core State Standards requires coordination among

educators, schools, districts, and states in order to achieve continuity among expectations and

practices. According to Conley (2011),

> As educators begin to translate the Common Core State Standards into practice, they have
>
> an opportunity to think about what is important. The standards lay out a road map of
>
> major ideas, concepts, knowledge and skills. The common assessments will measure a
>
> wider range of student learning than current tests do if schools take advantage of this
>
> opportunity. (p. 18)

 Further, Chalmers and Keown (2006) discussed that professional development activities shape

the decisions and activities that educators make in the classroom. The purpose of professional

development programs is to bring about change and continual growth in an organization. Wiener

(2013) asserted that professional learning should be engaging, meaningful, and incorporate

intellectually exciting activities for professionals which in turn establish meaning to the learner.

Teachers want and need direct application to their professional lives. Professional development

that does not indicate practical or useful ideas will not be utilized in the classroom. Johnson

(2006) noted that,

> Research findings suggest most teachers are not implementing reform and others who are attempting implementation are not doing it well. Many teachers in public schools have little knowledge of what inquiry is and have been reluctant to implement standards based instruction in their practice (p. 155).

Focused trainings need to take place in order for educators to properly implement the new Common Core State Standards with their students. Further, professional development meant to bring educators together is important, even if these educators do not teach at the same schools. According to Locke (2012), online resources could aid educators in reaching these goals. According to Santos, Darling-Hammond, and Cheuk (2012), professional development should be designed to unify educators and meet the needs of students.

Research findings indicate a need for increased rigor and relevance regarding professional development (i.e., Johnson, 2006). Educators need to have a clear picture of what the instructional expectations are in order to bring those skills to the classroom. According to Johnson (2006), research indicated that any successful educational reform initiatives must have the support of teachers. Lack of skill in key areas was an impediment to effective professional development implementation. Johnson (2006) stated that teachers must teach constructively, and acquire content knowledge in order to bring about reform. Professional development plays a vital role in meeting the needs of teachers.

Addressing the changing landscape of instructional methods is also important with professional development. Many modalities exist to share information, including social media outlets, and synchronous and asynchronous online classroom formats. Kaufman and Ring (2011) stated that positive interactions and relationships improved teachers' confidence and leadership

abilities. Individual states can develop the training programs and criteria for professional development initiatives in relation to the common Core State Standards. Further, Johnson (2006) asserted that changing instructional practices is a multifaceted process. Leadership is the key to bringing about change.

Research has indicated that educators should consider innovative and creative ways to implement a professional development program that encourages follow through and collaboration. According to Guskey (2009), effective use of time, focus and organization makes professional development more purposeful. Additionally, Locke (2012) indicated that utilizing the internet is an efficient way to achieve collaboration relating to professional development. Specifically, he stated that updated technological resources would be an essential element to effective professional development practice and training. Research has overall indicated that a common goal of collaboration exists to improve professional development, and that current technology is a tool that educators can use to reach this goal.

Technology affords opportunities to connect professional development to other districts and states, therefore connecting educators and ideas. Ash (2011) asserted that technology helped to bridge the gaps between states in relation to resources, understanding and assessment development. As a result, the Common Core State Standards could help to unify not only what is taught, but also how the standards will be taught to students through technology.

Effective Professional Development Practices

Effective professional development practices need to be research-based (Guskey, 2009). Cano (2006) indicated that effective professional development is an ongoing process throughout an educator's career and had a significant impact on student performance.   Professional development, like instruction for students, should be comprised of standards and learning

objectives. Guskey (2009) advised that educators have the right and responsibility to have high expectations of training consultants and demand research based evidence of the effectiveness of their programs. The development of these standards should be done with a critical eye.

As professional development is created, trainers need to understand that purposeful activities must have direct application in the classroom. Griffith (2010) asserted that educators need professional development that is focused on new lesson plans, assessments and interpretation of the standards. Further, Bomer and Maloch (2011) indicated that educators would have to be familiar with the language of the standards and research based practices. Effort is needed by academic leaders to relate the theory behind the new standards in order to relate theory and practice. According to Morris (2012), "the Common Core as an accepted framework across so many systems of education creates a new level of necessity for accompanying curriculum, teaching materials, and professional development" (p. 8). Resources and training would allow for a smoother implementation process of the Common Core State Standards.

Other criticisms are focused on the validity of the Common Core State Standards (Kern, 2011). Therefore, educators should approach professional development with an educated and informed perspective, which includes both the strengths and weaknesses of all reform movements. Educators have the right to form opinions and draw conclusions about their students (Cogan et al., 2013). Tienken (2010) stated:

> Developing coherent education and social policy is difficult. The CCSS presents itself as a neat and clean solution, easily manageable and easy to discuss. Unfortunately, the real world is messy and much more complex. We cannot eliminate the complexity of educating all students by putting forth superficial ideas (p. 6).

Educators appreciate evidence-based professional development decisions (Tienken, 2010). Data

collection is an important component of assessing the effectiveness of the standards over its first several years of implementation, and to establish that professional development activities reflect the rigor of the Common Core State Standards (Weiner, 2013).

Professional development should take place over extended periods of time. Life-long learning is the process of learning as an ongoing process for personal and professional advancement. Learning for both students and educators is an ongoing process, and not an event that occurs in isolation at specific times. According to Ferguson (2006), "The teacher survey suggested that professional development fails not primarily because the ideas do not work when implemented or because the teachers reject the approaches outright, but the ideas are not implemented" (p. 49). The value of the professional development must be evident and applicable.

The Common Core State Standards have become an instrumental part of planning, and educators are required to understand, implement, and assess the value of the standards. According to Guskey (2009), educators need time and opportunity to develop their skills, to analyze student work, and refine teaching practices. Therefore, the professional development related to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards requires a greater level of responsibility. This movement will be at the local, district, state and national levels. Further, Cano (2006) asserted that leadership is an essential component of effective professional development practices and the focus was on teacher preparation and practice. Strong leadership has also been identified as an important element in the improvement of professional development programs that have a lasting impact on organizations.

Research has indicated that most professional development programs are site-based; however, most teachers just give minimal effort towards implementation because they do not see

41

the program as a permanent part of their schools. Specifically, Guskey (2009) stated, educators'

and trainers' goals should be focused on student performance and effective teaching practices.

Quality professional development brings about change and growth for the professionals and the

students involved in the program.

Professional Development and Collaboration

The Common Core State Standards are the catalyst for sweeping professional

development movements. Locke (2012) asserted,

> Like it or not, the Common Core is here. The new set of standards for math and English
>
> language arts is designed to get students across the country on the same page as they
>
> prepare for college or beyond. It's an ambitious undertaking, and now is the time to start
>
> thinking about how it will affect your district (p.47).

Collaborative and extended professional development programs are integral parts of the

implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Opportunities for collaboration and

mentorship between teachers with different amounts of experience are also important in

professional development. As mentioned previously, "Vygotsky's (1986) framework of guided

participation provides a structured environment in which the learner is initially supported using a

'scaffolding' framework. The scaffold describes steps involved in learning, gives a purpose to

learning" (Anderson, 2011, p. 48). Teachers would need opportunities to collaborate and

construct knowledge of effective instructional practices.

According to Bray (2011), educators have a great deal to share and learn from each other,

which in turn benefits all students. Further, Porter et al. (2011) asserted that "to deliver the

promise of the common standards, the standards must address the problem of a curriculum that is

'a mile wide and an inch deep.' These standards are a substantial answer to that challenge" (p.

103). The standards gave the curriculum a deeper focus. Rather than exploring many standards

shallowly, the new standards require students to go deeper and demonstrate proficiency

(Finkelstein et al., 2013).

Professional learning communities are another reoccurring theme throughout the

literature. For instance, Cano (2006) made the following statement regarding learning

communities:

Professional development is most effective when it takes place in vibrant learning

communities. These learning communities take various forms, but all value ongoing

learning by teachers and students. They foster collegiality and problem solving, and they

emphasize continuous improvement in classrooms (p.2).

Unification of school leaders of a variety of experience levels allows for rich discussion and

collaboration of ideas. Cano (2006) explained that learning communities were generally a great

practice and a low cost method of effectively disseminating information among groups of

educators.

Clear expectations and learning goals are essential elements of what is considered

effective professional development. Henkin, Harmon, Pate, and Moorman (2009) stated that

educators need to form learning communities to help and learn from each other. Further, Guskey

(2009) asserted that collaborative planning and problem solving helped to develop a sense of

community and shared purpose. Effectiveness is based on the application of the skills learned

through ongoing instructional strategies with students. Additionally, strong school leadership is

an essential element of the implementation of any professional development program. Guskey

(2009) stated that "strong leadership has played a crucial role in every successful improvement

effort" (p.46). Leadership at both the administrative and teacher team level is crucial for support,

collaboration, and accomplishment of the standards' objectives.

Ediger (2011) asserted that experienced teachers had attitudes of positive self-efficacy and personal growth. Also, a respectful relationship between the administration, staff, and fellow teachers is crucial for the collaboration that must take place to share ideas and grow professionally. Ash (2011) indicated that the implementation of the standards was a revolutionary change that presented students with progressive, complex, and challenging tasks. The Common Core State Standards are not just a professional development opportunity, but are also an educational reform revolution.

Summary

The compilation of research contained in the literature view indicated the need for additional research on the topic of teachers' perceptions of professional development in relationship to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards with students. The conceptual framework of Constructivism and Social Learning theory provided the foundation of how both students and adults learn and scaffold knowledge through the incorporation of challenging learning tasks and collaboration (Anderson, 2011). The objective of any professional development program is the potential success of the students and the professional growth of educators. According to Conley (2011), if school embraced the challenge of the standard, the outcome will be students who are better prepared for a successful college experience or the real world problem solving involved in a career. The Common Core State Standards require students to "demonstrate understanding" through the application of knowledge rather than the repeating of facts (Porter et al., 2011, p.104). Educators have a responsibility to learn new modalities for meeting the needs of all their students in all sub groups (Porter et. al., 2011).

Additional research would help to summarize and identify the teachers' voices. As Cano (2006) stated, effective professional development has four elements: strong learning communities, proper resources, clear expectations, and vibrant leadership. Therefore, according to Heiten (2013), although the Common Core State Standards are overall intended to have beneficial results for both students and educators, there will inevitably be a learning curve. The research conducted in this study intended to provide insight into teachers' perceptions on professional development and the Common Core State Standards.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine educators' perceived professional development needs resulting from the implementation of the Common Core State Standards within District A. The implementation of the Common Core State Standards went into effect in 2012. As a result, 45 out of 50 states made the commitment to adopt a common curriculum, which will nationally align educators' instructional objectives (Ash, 2011). While a national curriculum is considered unconstitutional by some as it impinges on states' rights, the majority of states have voluntarily elected to be part of this movement in order to clarify standards and increase student rigor as students become active participants in their educational objectives.

With the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, students are expected to become skilled problem solvers and to take ownership of their educations as they mastered instructional goals. Students are expected to have clearly defined goals as they move toward college or a career (Griffith, 2011). I investigated the professional development needs of educators in district A during the initial implementation year of the Common Core State Standards.

The commentary gathered from participants in this study served as the catalyst for the development of effective training and redelivery opportunities for educators. The purpose of the data collection was to determine what professional development opportunities educators needed. Additionally, the case study format allowed teachers to comment on areas of concern individually and collectively. The data collected from the study was shared with the school board for administrative and planning purposes.

Research Design

This study was a qualitative, descriptive, multiple case study. Yin (2009) stated that case study is useful in determining why a particular phenomenon takes place. I chose to conduct a case study because I immersed myself in the educational environment. Case studies review multiple cases and allow the researcher to draw conclusions (Yin, 2009). The study was conducted by collecting and synthesizing responses from 14 teachers in the regular classroom and the special education classroom. I chose to do a case study because this research design had potential to indicate why a participant makes a particular decision (Yin, 2009). I selected a multiple site case study design because I observed a phenomenon occurring in more than one scenario (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007).

Participants took part in focus groups during the data collection process. A focus group allowed for a planned discussion in a nonthreatening environment (Yin, 2009). According to Yin (2009),

> The most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidence is the development of converging lines of inquiry a process of triangulation and corroboration emphasized repeatedly in the previous section of this chapter. Thus, any case study finding or conclusion is likely to be more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information. (p. 115)

Focus groups allowed participants to provide insight regarding the area of professional development. A coding scheme was developed to interpret the transcription of the responses provided. Theme analysis allowed for a consensus of viewpoints to be evaluated. According to Yin (2009), the process of evaluating codes begins gradually and becomes more complex over time. I also conducted a series of field interviews as part of the data collection process.

Case study interviews require you to operate on two levels at the same time: satisfying

the needs of your line of inquiry (Level 2 questions) while simultaneously putting forth

'friendly' and 'nonthreatening' questions in your open-ended interviews (Level 1

questions). (Yin, 2009, p.107)

Case study interviews afford opportunities for educators to share their insights in a non-

threatening environment.

I also allowed teachers to participate in the study with anonymity if they preferred.

Further, there were opportunities for educators to personally share ideas, concerns, and

resources.

Interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are

about human affairs or behavioral events. Well-informed interviewees can provide

important insights into such affairs or events. The interviewees also can provide shortcuts

to the prior history of such situations, helping you to identify other relevant sources of

evidence. (Yin, 2009, p.108)

Throughout the data collection process, I attempted to give the educators a voice in the decisions

made regarding professional development. Creswell (2007) asserted that the voices of the

participants should be heard in the reporting of the results.

The focus of the study was on the perceived professional development needs of

educators in District A in relationship to the implementation of the new Common Core State

Standards. The conclusions of the study were based on the combination of results from focus

groups, field interviews, and reflective journals. All of the results were communicated to the

district for planning purposes. A case study attempts to explain the viewpoints and experiences

of participants from their perspectives (Gall et al., 2007). The data in this study included an

analysis of the themes that emerged from journal entries, focus groups, and oral responses from interview questions. Using several forms of data was crucial and added strength to the findings. Triangulation of the data occurred in the cross comparison of the focus group responses, interview transcriptions, and journal response analysis (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009).

Research Questions

The following three questions were explored in the study:

Research Question One

What, if any, support did educators request in regards to the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards?

Educators needed a voice in the process of developing professional development programs in order to ensure the perceived needs of teachers were being met (Lewin, 2010). I worked to identify the means of support that educators may have wanted.

Research Question Two

What, if any, reactions did educators have in regards to the curriculum shift from the Georgia Performance Standards to the Common Core State Standards?

Implementation of the Common Core State Standards was a complex endeavor incorporating the time and talents of a vast group of educators and administrators. An understanding of the concerns that educators face allows for thoughtful planning. "The Common Core will become useful to teachers and policy makers only when it is part of a larger system of next generation assessments that track how much students know and how well they know it" (Phillips & Wong, 2010, p. 39). Addressing the concerns of educators allowed this study to show insight into needs for professional development.

Research Question Three

What, if any, methods would educators like to utilize in order to collaborate and share resources?

The manner in which educators share information within the district aids in the unification of educators within the district regarding a common goal. The foundation of collaboration is based on effective professional development practices.

Participants

Fourteen individuals in District A teaching at the elementary school grade levels two through five during the time of this research were participants in the study. The participants in the study were classified as both special education and regular classroom teachers. Participants were selected through a process in which participating schools shared an overview of the study, and volunteers who met specific criteria were able to participate. I selected from the group of potential participants those who were most representative of the specified criteria. The selection of diverse participants allows for a variety of perspectives to be represented in this research. Multiple case studies involve several authors in many cases for effective cross comparison (Yin, 2009). I examined the experience of educators as a variable in the study. Participating teachers were required to have at least five years of teaching experience in order to ensure exposure to both Georgia Performance Standards and Common Core State Standards. Further, participants were teachers both at Title I schools and non-Title I schools.

Participation in the study was voluntary and not based on principal recommendation. The gender and ethnicity of the educators varied based on the hiring within the district at that time. This qualitative study utilized purposeful criterion sampling, which is often used in educational settings (Gall et al., 2007).

Setting

The study took place in District A. The total enrollment of the district included 106,849 students in 112 schools at the time of this research. There were 67 elementary schools, 25 middle schools and 16 high schools. Among the 13, 551 employees were 5,588 classroom teachers and 1,464 special education teachers. The population of the student body consisted of 43.7% Caucasian, 31.2% black, 16.9% Hispanic, 4.9% Asian, 3% multi-racial, and less than 0.1% American Indian. In addition, 44.02% of students qualified for free and reduced cost lunches with a 22.64% transiency rate (District A, 2011-12).

Role of Researcher

I have been a teacher for 18 years. I have experience in teaching third grade, fourth grade, and fifth grade. Eight years of my teaching experience were in an inclusion special education setting. I serve in the classroom as a teacher leader. I also serve as a professional, who trains college students for academic success and employment skills. I did not have a professional or personal relationship with any of the educators at the schools where I collected data. I did not know the individuals that participated in the study prior to interviews. I do not hold a position of authority over any of the individuals who voluntarily participated. My role as researcher in the study was to report the results from focus groups, written commentary in reflective journals, and field interviews. Additionally, as a researcher, I shared the reported data with the school district for informational and staff development purposes.

Data Collection

Data collection took place in a three-pronged approach in order to ensure triangulation of the research (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2009). Data were collected using focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and review of reflective journals.

Focus Groups

Focus groups were utilized as one method of data collection. Grade level teams were interviewed with open-ended questions at each participating elementary school within District A. Educators had the opportunity to speak freely and collaboratively about issues related to the implementation of the Common Core Curriculum within the state of Georgia, and specifically about the implementation within their district. Responses were compared and summarized for each school through a process of coding and data analysis. Individuals' participation in the focus groups was voluntary. Focus groups were expected to help ensure that a variety in experience levels, ages, and that both males and females were represented. The use of both level one and level two questioning as suggested by Yin (2009) allowed the participants to answer specific questions as well as provide individual feedback. Specifically, Yin (2009) indicated that comments are often open-ended. Thematic analysis was conducted through the process of coding responses.

Each focus group consisted of the same interview questions, and utilized open discussion among the participants. With this method, I sought to provide insight into educators' needs and concerns. The three main guidelines when collecting data are maintaining proper control of the evidence, the use of many forms of evidence, and development of a database (Yin, 2009). Monitoring these factors in this research improved the reliability and validity of the study. In order to compare and contrast the responses of the participants, two focus groups were conducted at the Title I school, and one conducted at the non-Title I school. Title I schools were identified as schools with large populations of socially disadvantaged children with a high percentage of students on free and reduced lunch. Title I schools receive additional federal funding (Malburg & Lorcher, 2012)

Field Interviews

I conducted one-on-one interviews. Individuals voluntarily participated in interviews. Documentation was obtained, analyzed and retained over the entire course of the case study. I audio recorded and transcribed all interviews. One of the most important sources of case study information is the interview (Yin, 2009). Based on the suggestions made by Yin, interviews should be guided conversations in which individuals have the freedom to express their thoughts.

Journals

Educators participating in the study were asked to maintain an electronic file in order to record personal reflections and anecdotal notes. The purpose of the journals was to give participants a place to record personal insights or experiences related to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Electronic files were submitted at the conclusion of the data collection phase of the study, which was approximately two months. Data triangulation assists in preserving the trustworthiness of the study through the use of multiple sources of evidence (Yin, 2009).

All submitted resources from educators were included in the Appendices. A compilation of the educators' responses were also included in the study. Yin (2009) asserts that researchers should ensure that no single source of evidence takes precedence over any other. Documents included, but were not limited to, journal entries, focus group transcripts, interview transcripts, and educational research conducted by others. According to Yin (2009),

A final source of evidence is a physical or cultural artifact—a technological device, a tool or instrument, a work of art, or some other physical evidence. Such artifacts may be collected or observed as part of a case study and have been used extensively in anthropological research. (p. 113)

All resources were properly credited and cited.

Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2007), the process of data analysis takes place through the development of codes, and then themes are analyzed and discussed in depth. Numeric data obtained from ranked responses was collected in order to analyze educators' viewpoints on the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards. A synthesis of the main points from the transcription of the focus groups, interviews, and journals was compiled.

Yin (2009) stated that a researcher must analyze the evidence during data collection to determine causal links or themes. Theme analysis provided important information that could be used to guide professional development opportunities within District A. As Yin (2009) further contended, safe guards help to reduce issues with data analysis.

Journal entries, interviews, and focus group transcripts were analyzed for themes and patterns. Data were organized into thematic ideas and represented graphically, as according to Creswell (2007), "these are the core elements of qualitative data analysis" (p. 148). Theme analysis was an essential component of evaluating the responses from the participants in the study in an effort to identify patterns. Case studies aim to explain phenomena that were studied and seek to identify patterns (Gall et al., 2007). I analyzed transcripts from interviews, focus groups, and reflective journals provided, in an effort to identify themes within the responses. Gall et al. (2007) stated a multiple case study design utilizes themes that can be cross compared and checked.   I was able to draw solid conclusions through the use of theme analysis and coding. Overall, I sought to determine potential patterns present in the effective implementation of the Common Core State Standards and educators' perceptions regarding professional development.

An important focus of this study was to determine whether common themes were evident in the responses from participants during interviews, focus groups, and reflective journals. Overarching themes were present in all forms of data collection. The overarching themes identified in the study included the frustration that educators felt throughout the implementation year, educators expressed confusion during the implementation over expectations placed on them, and educators requested additional support. Overall, theme analysis is an integral component of this qualitative multiple case study. According to Yin (2009), qualitative theme analysis requires a complete analysis of all aspects of the evidence collected until conclusions can be drawn.

Through the use of ATLIS.ti7, analysis of word and related synonym frequency was conducted to determine the main emerging themes. Auberbach and Silverstein (2003) highlighted the benefit of coding by stating that researchers could use the process of coding like a staircase: moving from low level analysis in the raw text to higher levels of themes and subthemes (Auberbach & Silverstein, 2003). Through this process of continual comparison, I clearly identified three overarching themes. Additionally, numerous subthemes emerged within the three main themes.

Transcription of Interviews

I transcribed audio recordings from the field interviews. Interviews allowed educators to share their perspectives without the potential bias resulting from peers participating in a focus group. Case study involves inference based on the entire body of evidence which could include interviews, documents, or anecdotal material (Yin, 2009). I used the transcriptions to make such inferences.

The purpose of the transcriptions was to analyze patterns and themes of the needs or

concerns that educators were verbalizing. Protocols were in place to ensure the dependability of the process. An audit train was maintained to ensure the reliability of the data. Guidelines for case study research include that it should be possible to replicate a study in a different setting (Yin, 2009). The protocols that were set in place during the course of the research allowed for protection of participants' responses as well as limited interference from me. I did not interfere with the daily responsibilities of the participants, nor did I present unnecessary constraints on their time.

Memoing and Coding

There were various methods implemented to increase the trustworthiness of the data collected. Throughout the process, anecdotal notes were collected and recorded. I developed codes in order to increase efficiency in memoing notes. I was able to efficiently document commonalities among the content of documents transcribed from participants due to the coding process used (Creswell, 2007). I also included anecdotal notes in the memoing procedures. Memoing included color coding and theme analysis. In addition, careful data-securing methods were in place. The information collected from the memos were synthesized and summarized. As I collected data, I was able to draw generalizations.

Data analysis was performed both manually and through the use of computer software. First, all hardcopies of transcribed material from interviews, focus groups, and reflective journals were read and reread for common themes and color coded with highlighters. In addition the use of ATLIS.ti7 and Wordle were utilized to generate Word Crunch Excel spreadsheets and Word Clouds in order to give a visual perspective to the data.

I developed generalizations in order for other organizations to interpret and determine if research results would apply in their district. The triangulation of data allowed for an

explanation of a theme or certain conclusions to be drawn (Yin, 2009). People learn from experience and could apply their knowledge to different situations (Creswell, 2007). The intent of the analysis was to determine if specific needs could be identified through the course of the study to improve professional development within District A.

Graphic Representation

Graphic representation of the data is included in the results section of the study. Yin (2009) suggests that researchers represent data through the use of graphic and tabular representations. Presenting data in graphical formats gives the reader the opportunity to visualize the information presented. Further, various methods of presenting information allows readers to draw conclusions about the research. Both graphical and tabular representations were used to display the collected data from this research. Creswell (2007) recommended that comparisons of data should be made using charts, tables, and graphs. I developed visual representations of the themes that emerged in the focus group and interview transcriptions as well as journal analyses.

<div align="center">Trustworthiness</div>

I sought to ensure the trustworthiness of the study in all circumstances in order to report credible and reliable results. Trustworthiness involved several considerations which included transferability, credibility, dependability, and conformity as identified as essential elements of trustworthiness (Guba, 1981).

Credibility of the study was ensured through several processes which included member checks, triangulation, peer debriefing, expert review, and consultation with experts in the field of qualitative research and methodology. All participants in the study were provided with the transcripts from all focus groups and interviews they participated in for review through a process

known as "member checks" (Guba, 1981). Additionally, participants had the opportunity to review the identified themes from the study and provide feedback. Participants were provided the opportunity to meet and discuss the results of the study at any point during the course of the study and at the conclusion. The opportunity for feedback was provided to ensure that participants agreed with the results and their contributions to the study.

Triangulation was an important component of increasing the trustworthiness of the study through the use of multiple sources of data collection. Data collection included interviews, focus groups, and reflective journals. Multiple sources of data ensured a cross comparison of the responses in identifying themes and subthemes in a holistic manner (Creswell, 2007). I also received and applied professional feedback in the form of peer debriefing provided by my chair, the committee, editors, and experts in the field. Throughout the course of the study I communicated regularly with my chair through personal meetings, emails, and telephone calls to ensure my reporting methods were clear and accurate.

Dependability of my research ensures that other researchers could read and interpret my results and draw the same conclusions as I did. An audit trail was in place to ensure that the process of data collection was appropriate and additionally I made recommendations for improvement in reporting the data to provide clarity to reader. Notes and memo logs were maintained throughout the entire process of data collection and reporting, and were kept in a locked file cabinet will all of the documentation collected during the course of the study (Yin, 2009).

Transferability of the procedures of the study was accomplished through the detailed descriptions describing the criteria for the participants, setting, and data collection procedures (Yin, 2009). Confirmability ensured that the voices of the participants were heard and were not

influenced by my experiences or opinions. The audit trail process implemented was consisted with the body of data collected and improved the trustworthiness and transferability of the study.

Data Collection and Storage

I used a quality audio recording device to record all interviews. During the process of data collection, all files were backed up and transcribed. The process of proper storage of data is essential to ensure the safety and reliability of recorded and transcribed information (Creswell, 2007). All information stored on computers was password protected, and file cabinets were locked. A controlled system was set in place to ensure the security of the data. Evidence was discussed at length using multiple, not just single, sources of evidence, creating a case study database, and maintaining a chain of evidence, which is important in case studies (Yin, 2009). Proper data storage ensured that I maintained the chain of evidence and protected the participants.

Theme Analysis

During the course of the research, I identified themes, patterns, and stories that emerged through the data collection process. The outlined process was important in developing a narrative of the events and a chronology for the research. The object of classifying was to identify common concerns educators had regarding professional development. Classifications may be multidimensional and have overlapping or coordinated themes that emerge as research is analyzed. Yin contended that the purpose of repetition is to observe patterns in the data (Yin, 2009). I sought to identify the concerns educators had, if any, in common regarding the curriculum shift to the Common Core State Standards through a process of analyzing the raw data collected in interviews, focus groups, and journals. The process looked for relationships and connections between codes and themes (Gilgun, 2010).

Ethical Considerations

I did not share my opinions or comments during focus groups or interviews. I also had not formed any opinions on the correct way to design or implement upcoming professional development for our staff, clusters, or district at the time of the research implementation. I obtained permission to conduct research from the Institutional Review Board as well as from District A. In compliance with the research process, I followed the procedures outlined to conduct research. Specifically, I obtained formal approval for my research plan. Yin asserted that research should be conducted with the highest level of ethical standards (Yin, 2009). The results of the study are for informational purposes only. I have no influence or benefits from potential decisions made as a result of my data.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the possible impact of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards on the professional development needs of educators. The study explored the impact of this curriculum shift within District A, a metro Atlanta school system in the state of Georgia. The intention of the study was to provide insight for curriculum planning purposes. The goal of the Common Core State Standards is to increase the rigor and relevance of instruction for students in order to better prepare them for college, a career, and real world problem solving (Ash, 2011).

Introduction

Data on the topic of teachers' perceptions related to both the Common Core State Curriculum and professional development were collected over the course of eight weeks. The methods of data collection included individual interviews, focus groups, and reflective journals. Data were collected at both Title I and non-Title I schools. Participation in all three forms of data collection was not required of participants. Participants submitted their reflective journals via email, and data was analyzed after all interviews and focus groups were transcribed.

Theme analysis was conducted to determine whether data indicated common themes in relation to teachers' perceptions of professional development. According to Gall et al. (2007), researchers should search for themes present in the case to explain a phenomenon. Theme analysis is beneficial because an analysis of the data allows for main themes to emerge. Within this chapter, I discuss the themes that emerged after the data were analyzed. Interviews, focus groups, and reflective journals were analyzed in depth. The main overarching themes included the fact that educators experienced frustration over the implementation of the Common Core

State Standards, educators experienced feelings of confusion over the variety of expectations placed on them, and educators expressed the need for additional support. Auberbach and Silverstein (2003) stated that qualitative research requires the researcher to look for patterns in the data to determine meaning.

Data from the interviews, focus groups, and reflective journals were analyzed both individually and comparatively. Within this chapter, I have compared the common themes within the three forms of data collection. The theme analysis conducted in this study was comprised of several processes. I initially color coded hard copies of all the transcripts and reviewed them for common words and phrases over a period of eight weeks. After the initial color coding, note taking, and comparing, the transcripts and journals were analyzed using a qualitative word analysis program, ATLIS.ti7. This program generated Excel spread sheets that indicated word counts of all the words used within the body of the document. This process is known as Word Crunch in ATLIS.ti7. Word Clouds were also generated for each interview, focus group, and reflective journal. A Word Cloud gave a visual picture of the common words used in a document, reflecting words differently in the clouds through sizing and color. Words that are used more frequently are sized larger than words used less frequently. Using both Wordle and ATLIS.ti7 to generate Word Clouds, color coding was also utilized. Specifically,

> Content clouds are a type of visualization that summarizes the contents of a document by depicting the words that appear most often in larger, darker type within the cloud. When utilized as a form of qualitative GIS, content clouds provide a powerful way to summarize and compare information from different places on a single issue. (Cidell, 2010, p. 514)

Through the use of multiple data analysis techniques, both overarching themes and subthemes

were evident.

Overview of Participants

The educators that participated included 14 teachers with a wide range of educational experience. Participants also consisted of males and females of various races. Within this study, participants were referred to by their pseudonyms. Patton (2002) asserted,

> Good qualitative research contributes to science via a logical chain of reasoning, multiple sources of converging evidence to support an explanation…Sampling of research participants in qualitative research is described as purposive, selected for its potential to yield insight from its illuminative and rich information sources. (p. 40)

I intentionally sought to include a diverse group of educators within the study in order to provide a variety of perspectives.

In order to participate in the study, educators were required to have at least five years teaching experience. All participants were either teaching elementary grades two through five or held a position within the Early Intervention Program or special education program that supported a general classroom teacher at the elementary school level in grades two through five. All participants were teaching within District A during the study and were actively implementing the Common Core State Standards. Participants were also required to have taught the Georgia Performance Standards. Additionally, all participants taught at either a Title I or a non-Title I school.

The 14 participants were responsible for various areas of instruction in their classrooms. Four regular education fifth grade teachers were responsible for all subject areas. They implemented the Common Core State Standards in all subjects including math, language arts, science, social studies, and health. Also, participating in the study were four second grade

teachers, and one fourth grade teacher. Additionally, two of the participating teachers taught

second through fifth grade math and language arts in the EIP program. Three special education

teachers participated in the study, including two who co-taught in third, fourth, and fifth grade

classrooms. Special education teachers provided support for all subject areas in the co-taught

classrooms.

Of the 14 participants, two males and nine females participated in the three focus groups.

Six teachers participated in individual interviews, some of whom also participated in a focus

group. Five teachers contributed a reflective journal. Second, third, fourth and fifth grade

teachers were all represented, as well as EIP, special education, and ESL teachers. Additionally,

Caucasian, African American, and Indian ethnicities were represented. Specifically, there were

nine Caucasian teachers, four African American teachers, and one Indian teacher. A wide

variety of participants were represented in the study with responsibilities in all subject areas

within the second through fifth grades. See Table 4.1 for participant details.

Table 4.1

Participant Overviews

Teacher	Years	Ethnicity	Gender	Position	School	Grade
Ann	16	African American	F	Regular Classroom	NT	5th
Barb	12	Caucasian	F	Regular Classroom	NT	2nd
Carol	20	Caucasian	F	Early Intervention	NT	2nd-5th
Diane	10	African American	F	Regular Classroom	TI	5th
Ellen	10	African American	F	Inclusion	TI	5th
Fran	9	Caucasian	F	Regular Classroom	TI	4th
Gail	8	Indian	F	Special Education	TI	4th-5th
Hannah	11	Caucasian	F	Inclusion	TI	5th
Irene	20	Caucasian	F	Regular Classroom	NT	2nd
Jan	29	Caucasian	F	Regular Classroom	NT	2nd
Karen	7	African American	F	Special Education	NT	2nd-3rd
Lynn	28	Caucasian	F	Regular Classroom	NT	2nd
Mark	9	Caucasian	M	Early Intervention	TI	3rd-5th
Nate	7	Caucasian	M	ESOL	TI	3rd-5th

Participant Profiles

Ann

During this study, Ann was a 16 year veteran teacher and fifth grade regular education teacher. Her ethnicity is African American, and she has taught in multiple school systems. Ann has a variety of educational experiences, including collaboration with special education teachers and Early Intervention teachers. During this study, Ann was teaching at a non-Title I school and implementing the Common Core State Standards in math, science, social studies, and language arts.

Barb

Barb was a second grade teacher who taught a regular education class in a non-Title I school. She had twelve years of experience within District A. She has taught second, fourth, and fifth grades. At the time of this study, Barb had a variety of student ability levels within her own classroom, including several students receiving additional educational support through ESOL, EIP, and IEP (Individual Education Plans).

Carol

Carol is a Caucasian Early Intervention Program specialist who has worked with students in second through fifth grades. At the time of this study, she had twenty years of experience and had taught in multiple states. She taught in a non-Title I school, and has a variety of experience in fifth and second grades. During this study, she was implementing the Common Core State Standards across four grade levels in math and language arts.

Diane

Diane was a fifth grade teacher working in a regular education fifth grade classroom. However, her classroom consisted of students with English as a second language as well as EIP

students. During this study, she taught in a Title I school. She is African American with ten years of experience in District A at the time of this study. Diane often developed instructional materials to use collaboratively with her team.

Ellen

During this study, Ellen taught fifth grade at a Title I school in a special education inclusion classroom. She is African American, and she has taught in both New York and District A for a total of ten years. Ellen worked with a special education inclusion teacher who came into the classroom for student support and pulled students out for small group instructions. Ellen was a team leader, and often took a leadership role among her colleagues.

Fran

Fran is a female who was teaching fourth grade in a Title I school at the time of this study. She had nine years of experience within District A. She worked with a mixed population of students, with most of these students being EIP students. Fran has experience at both Title I and non-Title I schools. She was implementing the Common Core State Standards in math, science, social studies, language arts, and reading across the curriculum.

Gail

Gail was a special education teacher at a Title I school. She was educated in India as a child and moved to the United States with her family, which gave her an interesting perspective on the school system within District A. Gail had eight years of experience and her responsibilities included moving between four fourth and fifth grade classrooms. In addition, Gail had to coordinate her planning and professional development with two regular classroom teachers.

Hannah

Hannah is a Caucasian regular education teacher who worked in conjunction with a special education teacher who came into Hannah's classroom for several segments each day. The special education teacher also pulled students from Hannah's room for small group instruction. Hannah had eleven years' experience in District A. Hannah was a fifth grade teacher at a Title I school with students who had a variety of instructional levels and needs. Hannah was implementing Common Core State Standards across all subject areas with her students.

Irene

Irene was a twenty year veteran with experience in three school systems. Irene is a Caucasian regular education classroom teacher not working with any additional support personnel in her classroom. Irene had taught in District A for the last ten years at the time of this study. Irene had been at the same non-Title I school for those last ten years. Irene was implementing the Common Core State Standards in all subject areas with her second grade students.

Jan

Jan was a veteran teacher with twenty-nine years of experience. The majority of Jan's experience had been in District A, and she had taught eleven years at her current school at the time of this study. Jan was a regular education teacher with a large population of EIP or remedial students in her class. Many of these students received additional support from push in Early Intervention Program instructors. Jan was implementing the Common Core State Standards across all subject areas.

Karen

        Karen is an African American educator with seven years' experience within District A. Karen was a special education teacher who worked with second and third grade students, primarily in the subjects of math and reading. However, Karen was responsible for collaborating with the regular education teachers to collaborate and co-teach the subjects of science and social studies. Karen was implementing the Common Core State Standards with all of her students in both pull out and co-teaching situations.

Lynn

        Lynn was a twenty-eight year veteran Caucasian educator. Lynn taught a regular education program in which she was implementing the Common Core State Standards across the curriculum. Lynn taught second grade at a non-Title I school in District A. Lynn had lived in several states and has taught in other school systems outside of the state of Georgia. Lynn taught second grade and also coordinated with a special education teacher who was not housed in her classroom, and worked with another regular teacher as well. Lynn was often selected for leadership responsibilities and attended professional development on behalf of her team in order to redeliver information.

Mark

        Mark is a male Caucasian teacher who had nine years of teaching experience at the time of this study. Mark was an Early Intervention Program teacher who worked with third through fifth grade teachers. Mark expressed that working with so many grade levels and having to implement the Common Core State Standards in both math and reading for several grade levels was a challenge. Most of his students were pulled out to work with him in small group settings, primarily in math and reading. All of Mark's experience was in District A.

Nate

Nate was an ESOL teacher with seven years' experience working with students for whom English was their second language. Nate's primary responsibility in working with these students was to implement the Common Core State Standards while supporting students in their language instruction. Nate used science and social studies with his ESOL students in conjunction with the Common Core State Standards reading standards. Nate worked at a Title I school in which he worked with students in the third through fifth grades.

<div align="center">

Graphics Related to Themes

</div>

Themes and sub-themes are displayed in the following graphic representations. Themes are analyzed in detail in the following Discussion of Themes overviews.
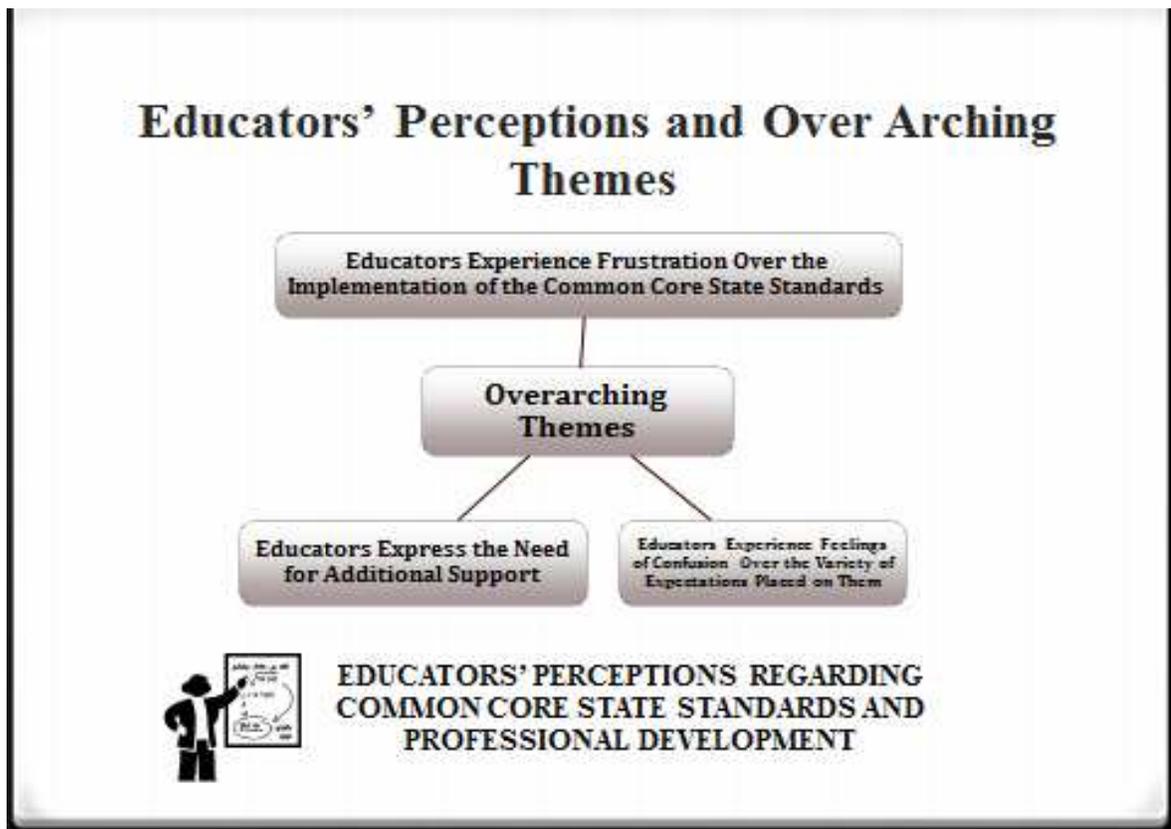

Figure 4.1. Over-Arching Themes, Teacher Pointing at Board, (n.d.). Source: Microsoft Power Point Clipart

Overarching Themes and Evident Sub-Themes

Educators Experience Frustration Over the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards

- Frustration regarding Coordination of Levels of Government and School Systems
- Frustration Regarding the Lack of Resources
- Frustration over Impact on Students
- Frustration Regarding the Use of Time

Educators Experience Feelings of Confusion Over the Variety of Expectations Placed on Them

- Confusion Regarding how to Collaborate with other Educators
- Confusion Regarding how to Collaborate with Other Educators
- Confusion Regarding Coordination between Government Agencies and School Systems
- Confusion Regarding Use of Time

Educators Express the Need for Additional Support

- Need for Additional Support to Impact Student Achievement
- Lack of Resources and Personnel
- Support Needed Through the Use of Technology

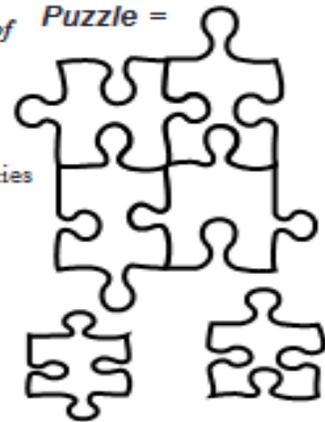**Combined Themes Equal all the part of the Perception Puzzle =**

Figure 4.2. Evident Sub-Themes, Puzzle Pieces, (n.d.). Source: Microsoft Power Point Clipart

Discussion of Themes

Theme One: Educators Experience Frustration Over the Implementation of the Common Core State Standards

Frustration was expressed by the majority of participants through a synthesis of responses from interview questions, focus group questions, and reflective journal entries. The degree of educator commitment to the Common Core Standards and professional development was matched by the range of reactions that teachers felt during the implementation year. The need to examine the frustrations that participants reported was important in determining the way that their frustrations with implementing the Common Core State Standards specifically related to gaps or perceived inadequacies in current professional development programs provided within District A. Information regarding specific frustrations that participants had during the

implementation year of the Common Core State Standards could provide information to District A to potentially revise or gear future professional development specific to educators' reported needs.

Fourteen participants indicated in their responses that they thought the Common Core State Standards were beneficial for students and would aid students in developing problem solving and communication skills, but teachers experienced high levels of frustration with the initial implementation phase. Ellen emphasized that the Common Core State Standards would be beneficial for students once everyone worked past the challenges of the initial implementation, and resources were more readily available that are aligned with learning outcomes. Ellen further explained that she felt frustrated by many factors in this initial implementation year. At the core of responses, all educators wanted to be supported through the transition and also wanted the best academic and real world outcome for their students. However, all participants explained that there were many obstacles to overcome before success could be achieved.

Frustration regarding coordination between levels of government and school systems. Twelve of the participants expressed frustration over the discrepancies between the expectations of District A, their local schools and from the day-to-day activities and demands they faced in their classrooms using terms such as "disconnect," "conflicting," unrealistic," and "contradicting." Additionally, Nate, Mark, Karen, Gail, and Carol noted concerns regarding meeting the needs of special subpopulations such as special education students and remedial education students. Five participants did not know if these concerns could be addressed through professional development. However, ten participants stated that the best approach would be to have trainers in the academic environment with kids, demonstrating effective teaching practices. Carol stated,

71

I have EIP and ESOL going in and out my door all day long. I've got behavior here,

behavior there, behavior there, and I want somebody to show me with my class and my

problems and my special kids how to teach this.

Participants expressed in the interviews, focus groups, and journals that they wanted real world

practical strategies that they could take straight to their classrooms with the resources they

needed to effectively implement the standards which would come with a coordinated effort of the

local schools, District A, and the state. Participants used the words "commitment,"

"coordination," and "cooperation" in response to the inquiry about the importance of

communication between educators and groups. Hannah explained that coordination among the

district, state, and nation could improve the effective implementation of the Common Core State

Standards. Twelve of the participants indicated that they were, at times, frustrated by the lack of

available professional development opportunities during this initial implementation year.

Responses from more than half of the participants emphasized a need to coordinate

efforts and expectations regarding the implementation of the Common Core State Standards

among local schools, districts, and states. In turn, 10 participants were not clear how

committed the state and school system were to the curriculum shift. Additionally, 6 participants

expressed frustration at the perceived disorganization and coordination of information that was

presented locally and during professional development. Hannah stated that she expected

District A to have trainings well-researched and organized before teachers should be expected

to participate so that learning could be maximized. Participants' collectively expressed an

expectation of professionalism and knowledge from trainers.

Twelve participants often discussed how frequently they sought out resources from other

states that have been implementing the standards longer and were perceived to be effective.

Hannah emphasized that at all the trainings she had gone to, trainers encouraged teachers to go to other states websites for resources.

Responses from 10 of the participants to the research question "How would you recommend resources and strategies be shared among educators and schools within the district?" indicated that coordination of all these resources in one place would be beneficial. Specifically, the development of a national resource bank that states can contribute resources to, access unit ideas, and print materials without having to purchase them would be beneficial.

Ann, Mark, and Gail reported in interviews and focus group discussions both anxiety and relief regarding common assessments and standardized testing in regards to the question, "What, if any, are your main concerns in regards to implementing the Common Core Standards?" The Criterion Referenced Competency Test was an area of uncertainty for participants, as the assessment had been revised to better align with the Common Core State Standards. Twelve educators were uncertain about the expectations of the exam and how students would perform. Two participants did not mention any concern over assessments. Ann stated she was relieved when testing results came back and her students had done well. Additionally, an important component of the Common Core is for students to be assessed on speaking and project skills. Five participants reported confusion over how this goal could be assessed with a standardized assessment. Mark concurred that he did not understand how a standardized test could assess a students' presentation skills. The long term impact of the standards on a coordinated common national assessment would be important.

In response to the question "What do you believe will be the greatest challenge in implementing the Common Core State Standards in your classroom?," participants in both focus groups felt as though utilizing Performance Tasks was one activity for preparing students'

73

written expression, problem solving, and communication skills. However, these tasks are difficult to assess and score. Participants commonly used resources from other states to compile these tasks during this initial implementation year. Mark elaborated further that performance tasks where important for students once the standards had thoroughly been introduced. Participants frequently reported the alignment of local expectations in coordination with other states as one of the standards' main objectives.

Change is often difficult, and a high level of trust is required to ensure that teachers are implementing the Common Core State Standards at the level of District A's expectations. Nate added that teachers' feelings of confidence were not as strong because they were uncertain what they were supposed to be teaching students. Clear communication of expectations and in general will ensure that the transition to the new standards is done effectively.

Carol, Lynn, Ann, Diane, Barb, and Mark stated that they often that felt unsure of themselves in the transition to the Common Core State Standards. Further, they were not sure if they were interpreting the standards correctly. Carol explained,

> I would like the county more involved and really just listening to us and giving us feedback. I don't know. I just feel that they are absent right now in this, and we're just expected to kind of go with it and hope that it works.

Responses, in essence, indicated that educators want assurance that the curriculum shift was a permanent change because of the time, money, and energy that they have invested. Continued effort to coordinate all participating agencies involved with the Common Core State Standards implementation could be valuable for educators.

Frustration regarding the lack of resources. One main source of frustration for educators, communicated by 13 of the participants in interviews, focus groups, and journals was

the lack of instructional materials they had to meet the requirements of the standards. All participants expressed often needing to create, buy, and borrow materials in order to instruct. Most participants explained that once they successfully understood the requirements of the standards they did not have what they needed in order to implement them effectively in their classrooms. Fran stated that teachers wanted to do a thorough job with students but were uncertain what all the expectations were and where to get resources to accomplish teaching tasks. The challenge with the process of implementation seemed to lead to a decreased commitment to professional development.

Educators who participated in the study had been required to develop local school assessments for each semester in math. Eight participants expressed a desire for these assessments to be developed at the district level and to be the same for each school, and others did not mind creating local assessments. Participants expressed that local school assessments were not comparable from school to school and that developing them was extremely time consuming. However, there was a benefit to developing resources because it required educators to analyze a standard. Lynn emphasized that working through the process of developing assessments had clarified some of questions she had and was a good learning experience.

Ten of the participants expressed concerns in interviews that District A was working toward its own interpretation of the standards and moving away from some of the common expectations of the standards in order to be unique; the other participants had no opinion on that topic. Responses were generated from discussions related to the question "What are your thoughts on the permanence of the curriculum shift to the Common Core State Standards?" Ann explained that this question was one reason District A did not purchase new resources during the implementation year. Lynn stated that District A often liked to implement their own

interpretation of educational initiatives, which lead to confusion. As a result, participants found the lack of resources frustrating.

Eight of the 12 participants discussed that they were willing to pay for resources in order to assure that they had the needed materials to implement the expectations for the standards. For instance, Irene stated:

Their language arts units that they wrote out this year, like you said, it wasn't very useful. But you could have gone to Teachers Pay Teachers and somebody has already gotten that or Pinterest and to see a unit, 'Oh, this is perfect.' You know, but what they provided us didn't do much.

Time is a valuable resource according to responses to the prompt, "Explain what types of professional development opportunities you would like to see offered." All participants indicated that time was one of their most valuable resources, and that they do not want to perceive activities as a waste of time because of the multitude of requirements for which they are responsible. Twelve participants stated that time was one of their main concerns regarding professional development and implementing the Common Core State Standards. Gail explained that she often spent nights and weekends grading and planning, and it was overwhelming. Professional development opportunities have to show valuable and long term results for teachers to invest themselves fully in the process. Otherwise, participants were likely to utilize the time differently in order to create the resources they need, even possibly bringing other work with them to do during these professional development sessions. Lynn agreed and stated that teachers are going to be working on other activities if they do not have buy in during a professional development session, and their attention will be elsewhere.

Jan and Karen were the only participants who indicated a deep disapproval of the

standards overall, while the rest of the participants saw a benefit for students with the Common Core State Standards. These two participants stated that their frustration stemmed from the fact that they did not believe that the Common Core State Standards were best for children. According to Karen, she actually believed that the Common Core would lead to failure for students and frustration for teachers. All participants indicated the need to have adequate and aligned materials for proper implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Frustration regarding the use of time. All participants noted frustrations over the time that has been required of them during this implementation year. Their level of commitment to professional development was directly related to how respected they felt their time was. If they were to be required to design and implement the standards without support from District A, then they wanted less time committed to after school training and activities. Teachers at Title I schools indicated more willingness than teachers at non-Title I schools to commit to professional development because they had more resources and time to collaborate with colleagues during the school day. Additional resources resulted from teams having frequent release time with paid substitutes to work on collaboration. Ellen shared that her team often committed nights and weekends together for planning in order to produce high quality instructional units to share with each other, pulling resources from other states, the internet, and District A's blog. Instead of introducing new resources, professional development directors should be "maximizing what is currently available to the fullest potential," according to Gail. All participants mentioned that technology was a major component in increasing the ease of use and maximizing current resources and use of time.

During the interviews, focus groups, and reflective journaling, all participants indicated frustration due to the demands on their time brought about by the implementation of the CCSS.

All participants' responses indicated concerns over adequate time to plan both independently and collaboratively with colleagues at the local school level and across the district. Additionally, participants were concerned about student performance using the terms "pressure," "stress," "accountability," as well as discussions over the data driven nature of the educational environment today in both Title I and non-Title I schools. Ellen stated that the demands for data collection had also increased over the last few years, increasing frustration and the need for teachers helping teachers.

Ten of the participants expressed in the focus groups, interviews, and journals that they wanted opportunities to bring educators together for a common cause regarding meeting the students' needs, collaborating with one another, increasing the rigor, and improving the use of time spent by educators. Lynn stated that collaboration between clusters in District A would also increase collaboration and productivity.

In essence, meeting the needs of diverse student populations was an issue at both Title I and non-Title I schools. Educators felt as though differentiating their instruction to meet the needs of the unique learners in their classrooms was the most pressing challenge. Four participants still reported students moving from school to school within District A, within the state, and within the nation as an issue. Six participants indicted that they hoped research on the Common Core would address these discrepancies and reduce the difference between school systems and states. Irene expressed concern over the students and the levels at which they are coming into school academically, as well as the degree to which they struggled with the expectations of the new standards.

Essentially, most participants at Title I schools expressed a higher level of comfort with the transition to the Common Core State Standards as a result of having more time, resources,

and support than participants at non-Title I schools. However, Title I participants were still concerned about the impact the shift would have on students, and also about having the materials they need in order to be effective with the shift. All participants stated that the greatest level of support and best use of time they had over this last year was supporting each other, as fellow teachers, using the terms "collaboration," "teams," and "sharing." Karen agreed she felt lucky to be at a large school and on a large team that she could bounce ideas off of. Effective and respectful use of their time, according to 10 of the participants, was crucial for ongoing implementation of the Common Core State Standards in District A.

In summary, theme one identified that most participants experienced frustration over the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Frustration stemmed from a lack of coordination of information. Additionally, participants discussed frustration over the lack of resources provided to them, and demands made on their time. Participants also reported being frustrated at perceived negative impacts on students from implementing the Common Core State Standards across the curriculum K-12.

Theme Two: Educators Experience Feelings of Confusion Regarding the Variety of Expectations Placed on Them

The theme of educators' confusion over the variety of expectations placed on them was evident in the analyzed data. Participants frequently discussed in interviews, focus groups, and reflective journals concerns regarding confusion over their expected responsibilities in regards to implementing the Common Core State Standards. Participants often expressed requests to unify educators in order for them to support each other with all of their additional responsibilities. Diane stated it would decrease confusion to have teachers from different areas in District A to meet for planning and training. Eight of the participants stated that the common trainings that

brought educators from different schools and districts together were one of the most effective methods to implement the standards and clarify expectations. For instance, Jan expressed that the opportunity to work with teachers from other schools and districts was effective in decreasing confusion and anxiety over implementing standards with their students.

  Confusion regarding how to collaborate with other educators. More than half of participants reported taking on the responsibility of collaboration themselves. Participants discussed in focus groups and interviews that collaboration (typical of a constructivist learning environment) within their school, district, and other states was one of the most important methods for educators to better understand the Standards. However, eight of the participants stated that most opportunities to network with other educators were primarily a teacher directed initiative and not part of any formal professional development activities, which led to confusion on how to accomplish the goal of implementing the standards and meeting the needs of students. Ellen explained that she often shared with colleagues the teaching materials she created, and compared the quality and content as an on-going process throughout the year.

  In addition, four participants perceived common materials provided by the state to be unnecessarily complicated. Five participants expressed a desire for educators to have ease of use with the materials, and for students and parents to have an ease of interpretability. The remaining participants mentioned only the need for resources. Educators, parents, and students only experienced confusion when looking at complex rubrics and overly complicated lessons. Hannah expressed her concern by stating, "It's from the state, but the rubric is ridiculous." Most participants stated they often experienced backlash from parents when grading projects and assignments, as the parents were not always able to easily interpret expectations.

  Participants stated seven times in focus groups and interviews wanting to use materials

that had been previously tested and determined to be effective instructional resources. Six of the participants did not appreciate the approach of experimenting with their students potentially confusing them, and wasting instructional time. Ten participants felt as though time was one of the most important resources in the classroom. All participants were acutely aware that they had limited time and resources to implement expectations and in which to work with their students. Fran asserted that it would be very helpful to receive materials that other schools have used successfully in teaching a standard.

Ten participants frequently relied on resources from other states to help direct them on the expected strategies and outcomes for the Common Core State Standards. Gail stated that she frequently used materials from other states and sought out examples of student work rather than relying on the state of Georgia materials. Other states and districts have been refining this process longer than Georgia, since district A's initial implementation was 2012-2013. In effect, most participants considered it wise for teachers to be depending on well-known best practices in these other states.

Ten of the participants expressed that collaboration among the county and effective use of technology were the most frequently used methods to bridge the existing gaps in expectations among District A, the state, and the nation. Participants also noted that collaboration among educators within a single grade level as well as sequential grade levels was as an important element of both effectively implementing the Common Core State Standards and clarifying expectations. Ann, Gail, Nate, Mark, and Irene expressed the need for ongoing collaboration opportunities, which built on prior understanding through professional development. For instance, Ann emphasized in her interview that unifying educators is essential: "When we come together we can all get on the same page."

When educators have opportunities to interact with other teachers, they are able to share their ideas and resources better, according to 12 of the participants. Fran agreed that the need to network with other educators and districts allowed for less stress. Ellen concurred with others in her statement that dialogue with colleagues was important, especially in small groups, and ensured the sharing of ideas.

Further, 10 of the participants expressed in the interview and focus group discussions that having opportunities for open discussion among grade level teachers as well as across grade levels would be extremely important. Gail stated she had had trainings in small groups with her team, and with the entire staff.   In essence, half of the participants expressed wanting to know first-hand which aspects of the Common Core are effective, from someone who is actively implementing the standards in their classroom. Karen explained that she was appreciative of the staff development they had received, but the best training she had experienced was collaboration with colleagues, which is supported by current Social Learning Theory Research and Constructivism (Fosnot, 2005).

Eight of the participants identified coordination of expectations as a weakness among District A and trainers on the standards. Participants were frequently confused by conflicting information at trainings. Hannah expressed her concern by sharing that there was confusion over what and how standards would be assessed, and participants wanted information organized prior to the delivery pf professional development.

Eight of the participants reported that the use of a common language and ability to understand the verbiage of standards is essential for both educators and students in clarifying expectations. Often the majority of participants implied collaboration was important in using the words "unity," "cohesion," and "coordination," as they expressed the need for a common

language in order for school boards to refine their educational systems and better meet student needs. Irene emphasized this point by stating that there was confusion over the interpretation of language and goals of the standards.

Additionally, six of the participants reported confusion over expectations in regards to student assessments. Eight participants discussed feeling confused by the requirements to develop local school assessments, particularly in math and writing. Over half of the educators perceived inconsistencies among schools regarding what student academic performance proficiencies should be. Lynn explained that clarification of proficiency requirements for students was important in decreasing confusion among participants.

Nate, Gail, Ann, Carol, and Irene commonly reported relying on other states' published resource data banks. In the interviews and focus groups, participants identified several states that they thought were effectively implementing the Common Core State Standards, and to which they turned for guidance. Karen pointed out, "North Carolina happens to have a very good one, and Tennessee has an excellent resource bank." In essence, six participants described the most effective professional development to be that which aids in unifying expectations and resources for educators nationally. Irene explained that friends in other districts had different interpretations of the CCSS assessments and instructional practices, increasing confusion among both students and participants of this study.

Ten participants recognized that they understood the diversity that existed between District A and the state. They requested professional development to help them meet the needs of a diverse population of learners, to assist them in differentiating their instruction within a standard, and to clarify expectations of District A. Lynn stated, "When you have a child that doesn't fit into that box, basically the public school system isn't made for them, in that we're

failing them." According to most participants, recognizing the uniqueness that exists among schools at the district, state, and national levels could allow for the creativity of teachers to be shared in a way that best serves students and helps educators better understand their assigned responsibilities.

Confusion regarding coordination of information. Eight of the participants expressed, both in verbal responses and journal entries, the desire for the county and state to better coordinate their efforts regarding bringing the same information and expectations to all school districts. Fifty percent of participants discussed that their conversations and relationships with educators in other school systems often brought different interpretations of the standards and procedures for implementation. Jan shared that the opinion of her team was that many of the teaching tasks were not appropriate for young students, even though the goal was to increase text complexity, problem solving, and rigor.

Five participants acknowledged that there are multiple methods to reach the same outcome. However, participants frequently expressed in the interviews, focus groups, and journals feeling that more direction in the process of interpreting the standards and designing instruction materials was needed. Mark emphasized, "Some of the standards, they weren't really explicit to what it was I was supposed to be doing with the students."

Coordination between the local school staff, administration, District A, and the state is crucial to educators in order to understand the responsibilities and the language of the Common Core State Standards, according to Jan, Fran, Hannah, Nate, and Barb. Ann concurred with others that the purpose of professional development should be to assist in the interpretation of the standards and lesson plans that are research based. As participants implemented the Common Core State Standards this first year, they noted some frustration regarding the consistency of the

information and the coordination between administrative groups and trainers. Specifically, Ellen explained that planning prior to implementation of the CCSS should have been more thorough, but over time, refinement of teachers' practices would take place and the process would be less confusing.

There was a great deal of confusion about how students would be assessed and what the expectations would be for proficient performance, according to eight of the participants. Further, 11 of the participants were unsure whether they would have the time to accomplish achievement goals for students, which would require a coordinated effort of all agencies involved. Nate stated that it was important to not lose sight of the fact that students need to master the basics before they could accomplish the complexity of the standards. As common and national standardized assessments were developed, the majority of teachers indicated a desire for professional development opportunities to be designed around their goals of coordinated efforts for student success on the required standardized and local assessment measures.

Throughout the dialogue generated in focus groups and interviews, all of the participants expressed the importance of purposeful and practical coordinated efforts in instruction that are designed to meet the needs of students and to simplify the process of implementing the standards for teachers. Nate further explained, "It is so many different strategies and different ways to do things, even from a few years ago. It is completely different." Furthermore, Fran, Irene, Gail, Ann, and Mark wanted to understand their responsibilities as well as the expectations of District A and the state in the process of meeting student needs. Mark corroborated, "I don't think really anybody had a clear idea what it was supposed to be." This clarity of expectations is needed to guide educators to effectively use their time and enable them to deliver consistent information through a coordinated effort.

Confusion regarding the use of time. All participants noted throughout the course of data collection that effectively using time was important with regard to professional development. Participants felt that administrators should be cognizant of their time within the work day and within their personal lives as a matter of respect and professionalism. "With professional learning that is hard too, because we're all trying to keep our heads above water," Barb explained. All of the participants indicated that they also wanted their time to be respected and were often confused about how to best accomplish the goal of time management. Teachers reported they wanted professional development that is not seen as a burden on their time, but rather an opportunity.

Seven participants expressed preferences for professional development opportunities to be embedded within the school day, while others preferred after school professional development in response to the prompt "Explain what type of professional opportunities you would like to see offered." Fran noted that teachers want their time to be respected, and that searching for resources was time consuming and would often result in people working on their own time to find materials.

Six participants at Title I schools discussed having academic coaches come into their classrooms and model lessons with their students in response to inquiries about additional resources. All participants clearly expressed in the focus group discussions that there is a need for professional development to be respectful of teachers' time, and for the program material to be meaningful to what they are currently teaching. According to Gail, timely professional development helped to minimize confusion and optimize understanding. One example of ineffective time management involved teachers getting information for a prior semester once the time had passed. Specifically, Irene explained, "Our county has for years used that Train the

Trainers model. The technology that our county has, we could all be sitting in front of our Smart Board getting a live-feed of someone teaching us things that were specific to what we need."

All participants at both Title I and non-Title I schools discussed the importance of their time being respected and used wisely. Professional development experiences had to be perceived as valuable uses of time in order for educators not to express frustration at the requirement to attend trainings after school or during the school day. Eight of the participants indicated that communication among District A, administration, and local schools was an important component regarding effective professional development practices and conveying expectations. Diane stated that initially she had a sense of being overwhelmed, but as the year went on she became more comfortable. Additionally, Fran stated that she felt untrained to implement the standards, particularly without the proper instructional materials and student resources.

Seven participants clearly expressed in focus groups a need for increased communication between participating educational agencies and local schools in order to decrease confusion, as well as to effectively meet the needs of their students. Additionally, more than half of the educators indicated that decreased confusion would allow them to use their valuable time in the best manner professionally.

Eight participants frequently mentioned in focus groups and in interviews the uneasiness they felt with regard to becoming overly invested in the Common Core State Standards. Participants also expressed confusion regarding the investment of time and money when programs and expectations changed from year to year. This inconsistency, in turn, influenced a level of mistrust in the process, according to Nate. Regarding the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, participants wanted to be sure it would be a permanent shift

before investing time and money in the process. Specifically, Carol emphasized that she did not want to experience the "bandwagon effect" where the schools were not doing what was best for students.

Twelve of the participants at both Title I and non-Title I schools expressed a desire to see the standards implemented for an extended period of time in response to the question regarding "What are your thoughts on the permanence of the curriculum shift to the Common Core State Standards?" Eleven of the participants indicated they felt uneasy regarding the permanence of the curriculum shift. Participants also expressed uneasiness and confusion regarding the amount of time and money spent on both Common Core State Standards resources and professional development before knowing for sure whether or not they would be moving away from the new standards in the near future. Specifically, Diane stated that in the past, many trends have come and gone, and teachers often feel as though they are starting over each time.

According to 12 participants, professional development needs to have an ease of use component in the future, as well as mindful planning so that teachers' main concerns about implementing the standards are addressed during the time they spend in these professional development sessions. As Carol stated, technology should be utilized effectively so that information is disseminated before instruction takes place. More than half of the participants want to have professional development break down the components of the Common Core State Standards in both a timely manner and logical sequence, in order to most effectively use their time. Gail stated, as a special education teacher she preferred to be trained with the teachers they co-taught with and modeling should be part of the process.

According to responses from interviews and focus groups, modeling allows educators to see instructors demonstrate the material they are supposed to learn rather than just verbalize the

material. Primarily, the majority of participants expressed concerns regarding timely presentation of upcoming material in addition to resources needed to teach those units. Nate explained that starting with professional development at the beginning of the year would increase comfort and productivity prior to instruction.

Eight of the participants indicated that a combination of after school and school day opportunities were important to have. Teachers expressed that they did not always want to have these time commitments after school, but understood that these extended hours were sometimes necessary. Eight of the participants indicated that school day opportunities that allowed for planning and collaboration with colleagues were most desirable. Ellen noted, "It is either done on our professional learning days, or if we have to have it after school, we have it after school." When participants' time was not respected, their degree of confusion and frustration increased significantly when discussing concerns over implementing the Common Core State Standards. Effective use of time was important to all participants at all schools included in the study.

The majority of participants indicated they wanted the opportunity to reflect and discuss what they learned together during training programs. Participants did not see simply listening to instructors with no time to reflect as effective and increased confusion. In fact, Diane stated that discussion among colleagues during professional development aided in the processing of information.

All participants used words like "team-work," "sharing," and "unity" to describe collaboration, shared learning, meeting with grade level colleagues and with individuals at other schools, which that saw as being valuable. Additionally, six participants indicated that they see value in both whole group and small group training as long as teachers have the chance to collaborate and discuss amongst their groups. Diane added that she enjoyed the interactive

professional development sessions where they also broke into small groups for reflection. Participants wanted to be sure that trainings were relevant to their grade levels and standards in order to decrease confusion as expressed in focus groups.

Nate, Ann, Gail, Irene, and Fran expressed that they are not resistant to learning new strategies for use in their classrooms. However, they do want to be sure that there is coordination at the district and school levels, and that these programs are implemented with respect to their needs. Seven participants expressed wanting these programs to occur during the school day. Nate explained he wanted professional development on the Common Core State Standards during the school day because it is so hard to focus after school. Additionally, the majority of participants expressed feeling as though modeling is the most effective method to demonstrate best practices. Participants want to see trainers actually work with students. Mark asserted that professional development should consist of observation of model classrooms and master teachers implementing the Common Core State Standards effectively.

Participants also explained in focus groups and interviews that the credibility of professional development instruction increases when trainers work with students directly. Interaction also encourages participants to increase their commitment to learning a new curriculum and decrease confusion. Eight of the participants wanted the opportunity to see professional development streamed via the Internet instead of having to attend a live training, which would use time effectively and decrease confusion. Podcasts, webinars, and live chat sessions would also give teachers the chance to collaborate and communicate with educators in other districts and states. In general, participants wanted technology in the form of both hardware and software to use with their students.

When asked about their perceptions on the permanence of the curriculum shift, all forms

of the data collection journals, interviews, and focus groups indicated that most educators wanted

to make a commitment and see the process through in order to truly evaluate the effectiveness of

the Common Core State Standards. An increase in commitment was attributable to a decrease in

the confusion levels of educators currently implementing the standards later in the academic

year.

In addition to previously discussed themes, participants expressed that understanding

their responsibilities, common expectations, and Common Core State Standards interpretation

were crucial for the long term success of the standards and for meeting the diverse educational

needs of students within District A, the state, and beyond. Unification of resources, assessments,

and teacher collaboration would allow for decreased confusion and more effective professional

development training, according to participants. Ellen emphasized that there is still more to learn

in terms of how to instruct students, and how to use effective methods of planning, and

assessment.

Teachers' acceptance of the curriculum shift depended upon whether students and

educators were evaluated equally regarding implementation assessments. Additionally,

participants identified consistent instruction and assessments as crucial for the longevity of the

standards over time. Ann added that this would help everyone to be on the same page in district

A, the state, and across the nation.

Participants collectively did not mind the bar being raised for student performance, as

long as all students are evaluated with the same bar, and educators were not confused about

expectations. Barb and Carol both mentioned the fact that other states were approaching the

content of the standards differently.

Dialogue among educators and the development of learning communities based on the

educators' strengths would allow for the collaboration of ideas. Individuals invest more of their abilities in a process when they perceive a greater level of understanding and have a knowledge base that supports the scaffolding of new knowledge, as discussed during the second focus group. Ellen added that District A dialogue should be initiated to work toward maximizing student achievement. Additionally, 12 of the participants expressed that the unification of educators through the use of technology and group professional development would allow for a commonality of expectations and decreased confusion about what is to be accomplished. Ann expressed that it will be important to unify the effort and goals of educators through the use of effective professional development.

In response to the question, "How would you recommend resources and strategies be shared among educators and schools?" participants reported wanting methods that would establish relationships beyond their local schools and that would respect the demands on their time. One method to accomplishing this goal would be the use of technology in the forms of blogs, resource banks, webinars, podcasts, and live chats. Fran agreed that coordinated additional resources on the state and county web sites would be essential.

Participants' collective experiences indicated a need to collaborate with other educators during the process of implementing the new Common Core State Standards. Educators wanted to locate and develop the best resources possible. According to seven responses in interviews and focus groups, educators from a variety of locations could participate in collaborative learning, decreasing confusion and more effectively using educators' time. Jan further explained, **"**I think we would have a better use of time with a dialogue among people on our grade-level from different areas."

Responses in all data collection methods indicated that professional educators want to

move beyond the theory of the standards and put best practices into effect in their classrooms. Fran explained that during the first year of implementation, materials came from all over, and needed to be organized in a useable format through collaboration and dialogue. In turn, nine participants acknowledged that with any new educational initiative, there is a learning curve and an inevitable period of confusion that would lessen over time.

Primarily, participants reported that their goals involved perceiving a common ground. Ellen stated that having a common ground to build upon using common resources and a common vision that would help educators implement the standards more effectively. Participants perceived that help in establishing relationships with educators who have similar responsibilities was important. Additionally, participants felt that developing a community of adult learners who can collaborate and refine what is most effective for students was important in minimizing confusion. Carol stated, "I think just meeting with other teachers. Like for me personally you're saying? I definitely need to go in and meet with other teachers, EIP teachers, and just see what they are doing successfully." Eleven of the participants indicated that building relationships with other educators created opportunities to establish common expectations, which decreased confusion and utilized their time most effectively.

In summary, theme two reported the confusion that educators experienced over the variety of expectations placed on them. Expectations included the sub themes of confusion over how to collaborate with other educators, confusion over the coordination of information, as well as confusion over how educators were expected to most effectively utilize their time.

Theme Three: Educators Express the Need for Additional Support

An overarching theme present throughout the study was the discussion of the educators' perceptions on types of support they wanted to receive at their schools within District A. Information related to the types of support that participants wanted could provide specific information to District A in regards to planning professional development programs. All professional development should be developed to meet the needs of educators. Participants discussed specific needs in the study in regards to implementing the Common Core State Standards during the initial implementation year. Participants identified specific types of support they wanted in their responses in interviews, focus groups, and reflective journals. Additional support included instructional resources, student resources, technology and personnel.

Topics included the availability of resources with respect to materials and personnel. For example, Title I school participants often referred to the in-house academic coaches they have as a source of professional development support in all subject areas. Eight participants indicated that teachers could access these individuals for advice, resources, and formal training. Ellen discussed the availability of academic coaches within her school, and the additional academic coaches and technology that teachers had access to in order to aid in their understanding and application of the standards.

As a result of the availability of academic coaches, 7 participants at Title I schools reported a higher comfort level than non-Title I participants with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Participants at non-Title I schools indicated in their responses in focus groups and interviews in response to the question "What, if any, are your main concerns with implementing the Common Core State Standards?," that they were often struggling with locating resources and with implementation of the Common Core State Standards in their daily

instruction. In fact, seven participants stated they would appreciate more opportunities to attend more in-services regarding the CCSS. Gail explained that trainings during the school day were more effective than trying to focus on training after school.

Need for support to impact student achievement. Every participant mentioned the importance of relating what he or she does with respect to professional development back to student achievement at both Title I and non-Title I schools using terms such as "responsibility," "student success," and "achievement." Participants discussed their desires for support and professional development opportunities as well as for the Common Core State Standards to positively impact students. Without professional development opportunities or positive student impact, the Common Core State Standards were seen as unimportant. According to Gail (and many of the other participants concurred), if professional development does not positively impact students' abilities to solve problems, think critically, communicate, and function successfully in school, the community, and the work place, then the implementation of professional development was not serving its intended purpose. Diane expressed that she wanted students to be able to problem solve and verbalize their thinking in writing. In essence, educators at Title I and non-Title I schools were equally concerned about the impact that the curriculum shift would have on student performance.

Participants emphasized that student performance was a concern on local, state, and national assessments. Regarding the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, all teachers wanted to be sure professional development support would give them guidance on how to best meet the needs of students on assessment measures. Nate explained that there are skills that are no longer in the curriculum that are important for children, and he was concerned that those skills would be omitted.

In response to the prompt, "Explain your thoughts on if you think professional development on the Common Core State Standards will be an important component of meeting the needs of students," all participants wanted to be sure they were meeting the needs of their students and that they were preparing them for life after school. In support of this statement, Diane expressed that she saw the benefit of professional development to teachers and students in the long term, and that the county was working hard to train them. Over time, students and teachers would appreciate the challenge and goals of the Common Core State Standards.

A hundred percent of participants explained that their ultimate goal and objective was to successfully meet the needs of their diverse body of learners. Generally, most participants were willing to participate in a variety of professional development trainings if a positive outcome for their students would follow, as long as they were provided with the necessary support.

All participants at both Title I and non-Title I schools discussed concerns regarding student progress and their need for additional forms of support, in response to the question "What is your comfort level with the transition to the Common Core State Standards?" Responses indicated concerns with meeting the needs of students at different ability levels. Mark expressed, "If the Common Core is successful teachers would be able to meet the needs of all students in the 'melting pot' of the schools in district A. In addition, seven participants discussed concerns over upcoming state and local assessments and how to support students. Eight of 14 responses indicated a level of concern over teachers being held responsible for student performance in revised assessments, such as the CRCT, that they were not familiar with. Responses regarding this concern included phrases like "going in blind."

All participating Special Education and EIP teachers discussed in interviews and focus groups being stressed by the responsibilities for the Common Core State Standards at multiple

grade levels and with several general education teachers. Often these professionals worked with multiple classrooms and have the responsibility of meeting the needs of students with IEPs who may have different needs and efficiencies than the general student population, and they stated that they needed additional support to accomplish these goals. Gail went on to explain that her comfort level had risen during the course of the year through the course of clarification.

Communication between general education teachers and resource teachers was reported to be essential by six of the participants. Additionally, special education teachers stated that they needed to be included in the same professional development trainings as the general education teachers.

Information was often relayed to non-classroom teachers second-hand, and participants reported confusion and frustration regarding their preparedness levels to meet the needs of students and to co-teach with the general education teachers, according to Karen. Gail asserted the dependency of the special education teachers on the classroom teachers form planning and resources. The majority of participants at both Title I and non-Title I schools and regular and special education teachers indicated that additional support was required to adequately meet the needs of all students.

Five participants wanted to be sure that research regarding the effectiveness of the new standards was conducted at the conclusion of this year and beyond. Further, more than half of the participants felt that results on student achievement need to be reported and shared. Ann emphasized that the obstacles are in finding the time to do the research for resources prior to instruction during the first few years, and that there would be trial and error involved in the process. Furthermore, Jan, Mark, Nate, and Diane wanted the standards to be studied and reported over a period of time to determine their effectiveness.

Perceived student impact was another theme that influenced the level of commitment to the Common Core State Standards and professional development programs. Half of the participants stated that they had seen improvements in their students' abilities over the last year. Particularly, they witnessed improvements in situations that involved writing and problem solving. Additionally, participants expressed relief with respect to how well students participated and performed on local and state assessments in the spring of 2013, as explained in reflective journals submitted at the end of the year. Ellen explained that her students were not anxious about testing and did not struggle with the vocabulary as she had anticipated. In essence, participants felt that the benefit to students must be evident. Further, as they perceived increasingly improved student performance, the majority of participants expressed a deeper commitment to the Common Core State Standards and accompanying professional development.

Lack of resources and personnel. Ten of the 14 participants stated that modeling by trainers was an effective component of professional development. Title I schools had more opportunities for this type of training according to responses. Due to academic coaches and additional personnel, Title I teachers reported frequently having trainers come into their rooms to model lessons and interact with students. Four of the teachers at non-Title I schools stated they did not have any of these opportunities and explained that this type of support would be extremely valuable for them. Fran stated that she wanted to see what a model classroom looked like; not just hear theory, but see practice.

Eight of the participants stated that observing professional development trainers interacting with students gave them more credibility, in response to the prompt "Explain what professional development opportunities you would like to see offered." Nine of the participants further explained in interviews and focus groups that they want to see effective classroom

98

management and instructional strategies implemented with students.

In all aspects of collected data, all participants discussed the need for additional resources in order to implement the new standards in their classrooms using the terms "resources," "scarce," "lacking," and "need." Educators also discussed how they have all had to personally borrow, search, and purchase items all year in order to satisfy the requirements of the standards, because their current textbook adoptions did not align with the requirements. Gail explained how teachers have used state websites, eBay, and Amazon to find and purchase materials. Eleven of the participants expressed that they mainly needed additional instructional materials for math and language arts.

Eight of the participants also stated the need for materials that were differentiated and leveled for their students. Some students were not prepared for the higher level texts used for the integrated novel studies. Hannah expressed a need for integrated materials across the curriculum to increase text complexity and meet the academic levels of all students. As a result of the need for resources, educators have utilized materials that are available on the Internet. Educators primarily share this information with one another by word of mouth. In turn, participants expressed that professional development programs should have all of this information in one place for teachers, in response to the question "How would you recommend resources and strategies be shared among educators and schools within the district?" Jan added that materials were shared and acquired and through websites, and that materials were mainly created by teachers. Most participants expressed that quality aligned resources that could be used with the diverse population of learners in District A were still needed.

Resource scarcity was evident through the data collection process. Nine participants discussed all of the strategies they had for meeting the needs of their students without the proper

99

resources. In particular, Fran, Carol, Hannah, Ann, and Nate discussed the need for math

materials and manipulatives, textbooks that align with the new standards, and integrated class

sets of novels related to science and social studies themes. Ellen also expressed that she had sat

through great trainings, but wondered when and where teachers would get the materials to use

with their students: "Like I said, I had to beg. Where are we getting the money for the texts?" In

essence, all participating educators wanted to be sure that the necessary resources would be

available for them to go along with the ideas that were presented in professional development

trainings.

Budgetary concerns and availability of resources were commented on frequently in

interviews and focus groups, as participants explained their main concerns. Fran stated that she

was stressed finding materials that supported teaching real world situations, and she was forced

to create most of her materials. Ten participants reported having to create, purchase, and borrow

materials in order to teach the Common Core Curriculum during this academic year. Creativity

was noted as teachers visited websites, adapted materials, and designed units of study for their

students. However, resources were reported as one of the main needs of teachers in relation to

professional development.

Ten of the participants did not just want the ideas delivered from trainings, but also the

resources needed to teach lessons without having to personally pay for the materials themselves.

Discussions in interviews and focus groups indicated examples of creativity in obtaining

materials. For instance, Ellen stated that she had to beg for materials and had spent a lot of her

own personal money. Ellen made wish lists on Facebook and Amazon and had donations from

individuals to support her with instructional resources. Nine of the participants mentioned that

teachers assisting other teachers was essential to building a community of learners and growing

100

professionally.

Participants generally indicated support for the transition to the new standards. Only two of the fourteen participants stated that they were not pleased with the content of the Common Core State Standards. Ellen stated that she looked forward to the future and thought that the students would ultimately benefit. Nine of the participants explained that they thought over a period of time, many of the issues regarding lack of resources and readiness of students would improve.

Title I schools had more resources for both teachers and students, but still struggled with many of the same issues of non-Title I schools. These issues include a lack of resources, time for planning, and concern over student performance. Ellen stated that they had a lot of different opportunities for professional development at her school, during and after school, several times a month.

All participants stated that they had participated in some form of professional development during the course of this academic year in response to the question, "Have you participated in professional development on the Common Core State Standards?" However, Title I schools had received significantly more professional development due to their on-campus academic coaches.

Support needed through the use of technology. Ten of the participants often indicated that it was not clear how they were supposed to use the different technological resources available in District A. However, training on District A's current technology was an important professional development topic of discussion to them. In fact, Karen stated, "I'm not sure exactly how all that technology works, but more than anything it could be staff development that is specific to grade-levels." Data indicated that technology that brings groups of teachers

together from different schools or districts and across grade levels would allow for the refinement of ideas. Karen further referred to Kristen's activities and stated she had shared her website and resources. Twelve of the participants indicated that the effective use of technology would be important in supporting educators, and would potentially increase efficiency in all subject areas.

Twelve of the participants wanted technology resources that were organized for them in useful formats. Participants wanted professional development that familiarized individuals with all the Common Core blogs, websites, and printable materials. In fact, Jan noted that trainers could utilize technology effectively for professional development purposes. Participants felt as though technology would be very beneficial regarding organization as well as development. However, they also want technology training to be brief and for necessary resources to be easy to access and use.

Another difference noted in interviews, focus groups, and reflective journals was that one support that educators had available to them in both Title I and non-Title I schools was access to technology, in response to the question "What professional development resources do you think should be offered to support you during this transition?" While all schools had technology resources provided by District A, Title I schools reported having more stand-alone computers in their classrooms as well as access to laptops. One Title I and one non-Title I school reported participating in a county-wide initiative known as Bring Your Own Device (BYOD). The Title I school reported lower participation in this program because students did not always have personal technology devices provided to them from home. Ellen stated that technology was one of the most important means to facilitate learning for students and adults. Technology was frequently mentioned as one of the most effective means of meeting the needs of students and

educators in regards to professional development and implementing the CCSS at both Title I and non-Title I schools.

The use of technology as a tool to coordinate professional learning opportunities and connect educators within a single school, a cluster of schools, all District A schools, all state schools, and all national schools was mentioned frequently by all participants. Participants also discussed technology as a means of sharing information, creating units, and reproducing materials to share and sell. Hannah shared, "Most of the teachers, they go to the Georgia Department of Education Website, and they try to pull resources." More than half of educators discussed creative methods in their use of technology in order to locate resources and implement the Common Core State Standards.

ATLIS.ti 7 indicated many websites that were used frequently in phrases among interviews and focus groups. Several teachers pointed out that many sites showed ways for educators to connect and support each other through the process. Ann explained, "In order for us to get on the same page, we do need some kind of connection. I mean it could be via satellite. Use the technology that we have to connect to other states." Technology was mentioned by 10 of the 14 participants as an essential form of support for both students and teachers as a tool to implement the new standards, as well as a way to improve professional development delivery methods. Ellen emphasized that, through the use of webinars, satellite, and streaming and video chat, teachers all over the country could connect and share innovative ideas such as "flipping classrooms."

The use of technology as a tool to bring educators together locally, state-wide, and nationally is a core element within the concept of a core curriculum. Nate stated, he often typed the standards into Google and obtained a wealth of ideas. All participants indicated that the

103

effective utilization of technology is essential in training and supporting teachers. A synthesis of the responses from participants indicated that technology overall is a crucial component in the effective implementation of the Common Core State Standards and professional development.

All except for Karen and Jan saw academic and real world benefits of the new standards for students. Hannah emphasized that students enjoy choice, and were excited about many aspects of the curriculum. In turn, participants stated that the emphasis on choice, problem solving, and communication skills was positive for students, and that technology was a means to achieve these goals. However, the impact of the new standards cannot be determined until an adequate amount of time has passed, and students have had the opportunity to practice over a period of years.

Participants stated that consistency among schools and school districts was a weakness in the transition, and that technology could be utilized to improve collaboration. Eight participants had concerns regarding performance expectations of students on assessments. Karen stated her concern over the transiency of students and the discrepancies between grades and performance expectations from school to school.

Nine of the participants discussed technological ways they have used to implement the standards. When faced with a challenge, educators can often design solutions that help their students and themselves, according to the responses from focus groups and interviews. Participants explained they often use websites to obtain instructional materials. Some of these websites are free, and others cost money. Ellen shared that teachers were encouraging each other to create and sell materials on sites such as Teachers Pay Teachers, after all the work they have put into their development. Often, when professional development did not meet a particular need, educators designed and shared creative strategies on their own to learn what they sought to

understand. Participants expressed that they felt a lack of support, and that technology was not being utilized effectively, considering the multitude of resources available in District A.

Sites such as Pinterest, Teachers Pay Teachers, and Edmodo were the main just a few of the frequently mentioned learning communities in which teachers could seek advice and resources. Twelve of the participants indicated that using technology and the Internet was the most preferred method to them for professional development. Participants indicated that through the use of blogs, live chat, webinars, podcasts, and interactive sites, they received great deal of support in answering questions about their preferred methods of support. They also preferred technology because this resource allowed them to be efficient and to effectively incorporate the technological resources already available in District A.

Eight of the participants indicated their commitment levels regarding Common Core State Standards implementation. All participants indicated that they had frustrations with the level of support during the initial implementation year, but expected improvements to take place over time. Additionally, 10 out of 14 participants expressed an expectation that adequate time would be necessary to determine the effectiveness of the standards. Ellen expressed, that the increased rigor was valuable for students, and technology could be used to meet the diverse groups of learners present in District A: "I believe it was a necessary shift." In total, eleven participants believed that student success was the primary intended outcome of the new standards. Educators' primary objectives were to best meet the needs of their students using the most efficient and effective methods, including technology for themselves professionally.

Eight of the participants discussed concerns regarding how to communicate with parents regarding the Common Core State Standards. Nine of the participants indicated that they thought the school district administrators should provide these resources to parents using

technology. Additionally, eight participants felt as though some professional development training should be dedicated to the topic of parent communication. Ann explained that parents were not taught this way when they were in school and many strategies are unfamiliar. Eight of the participants expressed wanting developers and administrators to address the lack of support and assist parents with this transition. Carol added, "I've had a lot of complaints from parents about the new curriculum and how they think it is silly and it is not friendly to children." Eight participants expressed that there was a communication discrepancy with parents regarding math instruction stating the terms "confusion," "different from how they were taught," and "new methods." Additionally, educators requested ways to bridge the gap between home and school by using technology.

All participants discussed the wealth of information available to them on the Internet, and some discussed Internet resources that they did not mind paying for. However, participants were more willing to invest in using a website if the website were substantially user-friendly. Nate noted that District A's blog was not very user friendly. Ten of the participants mentioned using other states' websites to obtain materials and guidance specifically regarding the Common Core. Most participants highly desired professional development that incorporated technological resources. Additionally, Ann explained that even the use of Common Core phone and iPad apps were intriguing. In essence, educators indicted that technology is the only way to stay competitive with other states.

Eleven of the participants indicated that their priorities included planning for upcoming academic years. Irene stated that next year she would feel better prepared because she would have collected and organized materials and would know what to expect. Technology was a means of bridging the need for support that Gail, Nate, Mark, Irene, and Ann all discussed in

106

responses. The majority of participants often expressed interest in the opportunity to visit other schools and observe best practices both in person and through the use of technology. Diane explained the opportunity to go to other schools and observe teachers and Common Core lessons was desirable.

Educators at all of the participating schools described observation as one of the most effective professional development practices. Technology was emphasized as an excellent way to meet this goal and was often underutilized, according to most educators during this implementation year. Lynn expressed, that District A has so much technology available that could be utilized more effectively to meet the goal of training.

Four participants described the process of unifying local expectations within the state and the nation as finding "common ground." Participants perceived common ground to be fully aligned expectations for student performance and proficiency, and technology could possibly be used to achieve this goal. In order to have uniform expectations for student standardized test and classroom performance, participants felt a need for common national assessments and grading criteria from school to school.

Ellen raised the point that some parents were considering private school because they were concerned the new standards might not be rigorous enough and wanted to see technology available to all students. Technology is a tool that is underutilized within District A for instruction and professional development, according to Karen. Technology was one of the most requested forms of support by most educators both for professional development and meeting the needs of students.

Within theme three, educators expressed their need for additional support. Specifically, educators reported that they needed assistance in positively impacting students. Educators also

stated that they required additional resources and personnel to meet the requirement of the

Common Core State Standards. Technology was identified as a tool that could improve the

implantation process of the Common Core State Standards.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The implementation of the Common Core State Standards in District A was an initiative to improve the rigor and relevance of academic standards for students (Ash, 2011). This qualitative multiple case study examined teachers' perceptions regarding the Common Core State Standards and professional development. Data collection involved the process of triangulation through the use of interviews, focus groups, and reflective journals in order to improve the trustworthiness of the study.

I obtained permission to conduct research from the Institutional Review Board, from District A, and from individual principals at participating schools. Professional development has been ongoing throughout District A during the 2012-2013 academic year, in order to support educators with the process of implementing the new standards. Participants shared their perceptions about the new standards and professional development as they chose to voluntarily participate in this study regarding their perceptions of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and professional development. Educators involved in the study participated voluntarily, and had the right to withdraw at any point during the course of the study. Though they had the option, no participants chose to withdraw before the conclusion of the study.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this multiple case study was to examine teachers' perceptions in regards to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and professional development. Three research questions were examined and theme analysis was conducted. Three themes emerged during the course of the interview transcripts, focus group, and reflective journal analyses. Additionally, subthemes of frustration over the lack of resources, coordination

between governing agencies, impact on students, frustration over the use of time, frustration with the implementation of the use of technology and collaboration with other educators were evident in participant responses. All results were examined and reported through the lens of Constructivism and Social Learning Theory (Fosnot, 2005).

Research Questions and Analysis of Research

 Research question one. The first research question addressed the support that educators requested regarding the implementation of the new Common Core State Standards. Essentially, every participant indicated a need for support including resources, personnel, utilization of technology and relevant training during the shift from Georgia Performance Standards to the Common Core State Standards. Twelve participating educators stated that they did not need a tremendous amount of involvement in the form of professional development, but that professional development would nonetheless be a useful method in supporting them during the curriculum shift. Twelve participants indicated the need for additional resources as their main form of support. Educators expressed that they needed materials related to the new standards and needed further instruction on available resources to them. Participants stated that they needed Teachers Editions (TEs) that coincide with student materials to support their instruction and planning.

 Educators at Title I schools indicated having received a greater level of support than educators at non-Title I schools, in the forms of resources and educational support staff. Further, seven Title I participants reported a higher level of overall satisfaction with the curriculum shift. Additionally, 10 participant responses indicated that Title I schools received more funds for student and teacher resources. Therefore, seven Title I participants reported a greater comfort level with professional development programs. All participants indicated a need for instructional

110

resources and personnel. Seven participants discussed having large classroom sizes. However, seven participants at Title I schools reported having lower numbers of students than participants at non-Title I schools. All participants viewed this smaller classroom size as a benefit in implementing the Common Core State Standards.

Twelve participants requested resources as a necessity in effectively implementing the standards. Specifically, participants expressed needing math and language arts resources. Participants indicated that professional development is not effective without the resources to implement lessons in their classrooms in order to improve student achievement and maximize teacher performance. In turn, research supports the importance of resources as a component of effective constructivist professional development practices. Postholm (2012) asserted:

> In these two paradigms the learner is perceived as active in the learning process. In the cognitivist paradigm learning takes place when an individual is taught or is mentally stimulated in other ways, and in the constructivist paradigm, knowledge is perceived as the construction of meaning and understanding within social interaction. (p. 406)

Participants had passionate responses in regards to concerns over the lack of resources and the impact that the implementation of the Common Core State Standards would have on student achievement and the expectations that were placed on educators.

The construction of knowledge is defined by constructivists as an active process achieved through collaboration and hands-on learning (Kanvaria, 2010). Resources are an important component with regard to learning within professional development settings (Creswell, 2007). Adequate resources allow for educators to meet the needs of students and further for them to use their time efficiently by not researching materials. Participants stated that they were concerned that the lack of resources available for instruction and students would negatively impact student

performance and over all long-term achievement.

Research question two. The second research question addressed educators' potential reactions to the shift from Georgia Performance Standards to the Common Core State Standards. Twelve of the responses indicated that the curriculum shift was positive for students, but would require a rather difficult transition period. All participants emphasized concerns regarding a lack of resources and the immediate impact on student performance. Twelve participants reported the benefits of the curriculum shift, but indicated that educators need greater support to meet the student goals of the standards

Six of the participants also reported feeling uneasy about the permanence of the curriculum shift. Ten of the participants commented on the time and money investments they have made in the past, only to have a swift change in direction soon after. Six participants expressed wanting assurance that the time, effort, and monetary investments they made over the implementation year would continue to be a priority for District A.

The majority of participants in Title I and non-Title I schools indicated that their commitment level would be based on the investment that District A administrators committed to training and resources for educators to use during this challenging time in education. Moreover, responses from participants reflected a commitment to student success and professionalism.

Participants expressed a variety of reactions in response to the curriculum shift. For instance, half of the participants discussed the lack of coordination among decision-making entities in the district and the state. Participants had concerns regarding the impact of the new standards on students' long-term achievements. Participants also expressed frustration with student assessments. Evidence from the responses indicated that only professional development with practical application for students was necessary. Qualitative research focused on the reasons

specific outcomes have occurred (Yin, 2009). Participants wanted to understand why they were being required to implement the Common Core State Standards. Most practically, participants wanted to understand how to implement the standards effectively for students.

Professional development trainers should address these issues in order for these programs to be valuable to educators. The Common Core State Standards are a complex set of academic standards, and implementing them will not be an easy task (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). A constructivist learning environment allows opportunities for educators to collaborate and share ideas for the acquisition of new knowledge and applicable learning (Kundi & Nawaz, 2010).

Research question three. With the third research question, I investigated the methods that educators would like to utilize in order to collaborate and share resources. In essence, all participants indicated several preferences in regards to collaboration, learning new strategies, and sharing resources. For instance, several participants discussed the use of technology as an essential method of collaborating at the local, state, and national levels. Additionally, half of the participants emphasized the importance of opportunities to speak with their grade level teams as well as with educators from other schools during both the school day and after school. Title I and non-Title I participants equally indicated the importance of collaboration. Twelve participants also indicated that collaboration would serve as a method to decrease teacher frustration with the curriculum shift.

Four participants further indicated the need to be efficient and overall good stewards of the taxpayers' money. Professional development related to the Common Core State Standards should be delivered in the most efficient and meaningful format possible. The majority of responses indicated that effective use of time and resources were common themes.

Opportunities to share resources and ideas with other educators at and beyond the county

level will allow for the creative exchange of ideas needed to meet to the needs of both teachers and students. Twelve participants discussed the importance of collaboration numerous times within interviews, focus groups, and journal entries. Eight participants reported the more perceived support from the local school and school district, the less frustration they expressed.

Primarily, participants discussed technology in focus groups, interviews, and reflective journals. Twelve participants believed technology to be an efficient method for sharing information, conducting professional development, and encouraging collaboration and social learning. Postholm (2013) stated:

> Facts are not transferred to the learners, but the learners appropriate their own meaning relating to the content by means of cultural artifacts. Cultural artifacts may, in this context, be language used in conversation, or the learner may be in dialogue with a text. (p. 406)

Collaboration allows for the exchange of ideas and the scaffolding of knowledge. Technology is a tool that can be respectfully incorporated into participants' busy schedules and increase social learning (Fosnot, 2005). Technology allows for flexibility in professional development, and can facilitate collaboration among large groups of educators outside of their districts. Meaningful professional development includes resources for educators to use and access as they may need. Four participants identified internet-based resource banks as important (such as District A's created resource banks), as long as these resources are user friendly. The majority of participants indicated that building relationships with other educators created opportunities to establish common expectations, decreased confusion, and utilized their time most effectively. More than half of participants expressed frustration with websites that were difficult to navigate. In consensus, participants from all schools were excited for the potential opportunities that

technology would present for both educators and students.

Theoretical Framework Applied

In this section, I review the analysis of the themes present in participant responses as they relate to the theoretical framework of constructivism. Constructivism had applications in the area of adult learning and the area of professional development and resulting impact of the CCSS. Powell and Kalina (2009) asserted that a constructivist classroom is an environment where students are free to communicate and take risks and learn from interaction with their peers.

Participants discussed increased rigor of the new standards and the need to better prepare students for either college or a career. Additionally, participants reported that the Common Core State Curriculum allows students to develop their communication skills both verbally and in writing. As Powell and Kalina (2009) stated, constructivist teaching practices had a positive impact on students academically and socially. Participants saw the curriculum shift as an opportunity for both teachers and students to grow intellectually and professionally. Kundi and Nawaz (2010) stated that active engagement and social learning promotes the construction of knowledge. The Common Core State Standards were developed around the premise that students should be active learners.

Participants at all schools concurred that one of the challenges with implementing the new standards was dissecting the standards into parts and really breaking them down in order to be sure all concepts in the standards were covered. The delivery and quality of professional learning determined the level of understanding that teachers obtained and the complexity of learning strategies offered to students (Santos et. al., 2012).

Participants expressed that collaboration and coordination were both vital in making the

implementation of the standards smoother. School districts across the country are working to incorporate the goals of professional development and resource adoption (Morris, 2012). Bringing unity within the district and among states would require coordination and dedication of all the agencies involved. Increased organization of the communication of information provided to educators would increase buy in.

Impact on Students

Participants often indicated wanting to ensure that the designed professional development and resulting student impact was reviewed by developers. All educators indicated that they wanted to do what was best for students. As Powell and Kalina (2009) presented,

Lev Vygotsky, the founding father of social constructivism believed in social interaction and that it was an integral part of learning. Social constructivism is based on the social interactions a student in the classroom along with a personal critical thinking process. (p. 243)

The new standards were only seen as beneficial if they were appropriate for students, helped them become better problem solvers, and helped to prepare them for college or a career. The Common Core State Standards should improve problem solving and communication skills in young adults. Constructivism supports the concept that students' learning will significantly improve in relationship to applicability of instruction to their lives and scaffolding of knowledge (Kanvaria, 2010).

Participants stated that the standards have important components that teach students that they all have a future and they all need to plan. If their future does not include college, they still have the responsibility to be a good problem solver and communicator because they will still need to take care of themselves and their future families in our increasingly demanding and

competitive work force. Participants also discussed how college was not a realistic path for all students. Opportunities for students to study a trade or real world skills should be part of all school curriculums.

Participants described frustration with all of the new instructional methods that they were required to use with students. Often students were not familiar with these different methods, including modeling. Moving away from traditional algorithms initially will require a learning transition for students that over time should become less challenging. As Powell and Kalina (2009) stated, children learn better when they have the support and collaboration of their peers as defined in Constructivist Learning Theory.

Increased rigor of tasks and relevance of instruction to the real world is an important element of the Common Core State Standards. In turn, participants at all participating schools explained that their primary objective is to help students to become as competitive as possible in our ever increasing global economy. As Powell and Kalina (2009) pointed out, Vygotsky's research and theory are intertwined in the concepts of zone of proximal development and through student learning communities. Educators' primary objective is to help children learn in an optimal environment.

Participants wanted assessments to be common and to not differ so much from other schools and districts. In other words, participants felt that uniformity of expectations will be more beneficial to students. Assessments for students, according to participants, should have real world application and not just a regurgitation of information. Kundi and Nawaz (2010) supported this idea in their research by stating that constructivism focused on the development of personal meaning in collaborative learning situations.

Collaboration with Other Educators

Participants explained that as a result of the need to understand the Common Core State Standards and the lack of training on the topic, they have pulled together within their grade level teams and reached out to teachers in other schools for collaboration. Additionally, the ability to network through formal professional development and informal avenues such as blogging will help to connect teachers at the local, state, and national level. This practice of collaboration and constructivism is applicable for both adult and student learners in all learning situations (Powell & Kalina, 2009).

Participants indicated that communication about the language of the standards with both educators and students was a vital part of effective implementation. Essentially, scaffolding learning and concepts was important for both adult and student learners. Collaboration among educators within the same grade level teams and vertically among sequential grade levels emerged as an important element of both effectively implementing the Common Core State Standards and providing professional development opportunities.

Participants explained that collaboration among grade level teams and educators at different schools was one of the most effective forms of support for educators. Further, participants noted that they felt the most supported by colleagues. Also, the most significant exchange of ideas, active learning, and sharing of resources occurred in situations where educators had time during the academic day to plan and work together. Professional development opportunities that allow for periods of collaboration were identified as the most effective at both Title I and non-Title I schools. Opportunities for cross grade level collaboration would likely lead to more opportunities for students.

Participants at Title I schools expressed concern about meeting the needs of their unique

student populations. Participants expressed a desire for professional development programs that support the needs of these unique learners. Some of the difficulties that students at Title I schools faced include academic gaps and socially disadvantaged circumstances. Research-based activities to meet the needs of students and to ensure that expectations are in line with students' ability levels and needs were essential.

Commitment levels to participating in professional development trainings were directly related to participants' perceived applicability to their classrooms. In other words, teachers wanted to see instructional best practices in action, and not only in theory. Additionally, most participants indicated a lower level of commitment to professional development situations where they were passive listeners in a big audience. Participants mostly desired professional development in smaller groups that involved modeling, technology, and higher levels of reflection.

Coordination of Information

All participants indicated that coordination among divisions of personnel within local schools, districts, and states was highly important. Participants noted frustration with receiving conflicting information from different individuals or departments within District A. Specifically, participants stated that the model used for training was outdated and that information gets confused as it is passed through several individuals. Therefore, participants suggested that local schools should get information first hand via the internet in order to implement a more effective form of communication.

Participants noted that coordination among districts, states, and the nation was a weakness with respect to the Common Core State Standards. Participants thought that over time, this lack of coordination would improve and that coordination between agencies would benefit

both teachers and students. As Kanvaria (2010) pointed out, the trainers' responsibility is to organize learning tasks that build on the learners' present state of experience and understanding. Teachers hope the sequence of the new standards would help eliminate learning gaps as students move from district to district and state to state. Postholm (2009) stated teachers needed to move from just theory to effective practice in the classroom in learning community where they could share their ideas and impressions. Administrative coordination can help educators foster a community of learners and develop trust with educators. Postholm (2009) stated:

> Cultures create structures, and structures are formed by cultures. School leaders may contribute to changing structures and creating cultures…they can distribute leadership to persons who have no formal leadership qualification but who can support change and development both culturally and structurally. (p. 423)

Communication skills are an important part of the Common Core State Standards. Participants indicated that they would appreciate more professional development on how to help their students achieve the speaking and presentation requirements. The CCSS helped educators build conceptual understanding across the curriculum (Kanvaria, 2010). Communication among teachers, administration, and District A was an essential component of planning professional development.

Home school communication with parents was also identified as an area in which participants struggled. More information needed to be made available to parents to help ease the transition to the new standards. In order for professional development to be effective, parents and the community have to be part of the chain of information. Karavin (2010) pointed out that social interactions both at school and at home promote learning. This interaction should be emphasized more within professional development.

A variety of professional development trainings have taken place during the course of this initial implementation year of the Common Core State Standards in District A. Staff development has included quarterly training meetings for grade level representatives, after which the representative delivered the information to their respective teams. Both Title I schools and non-Title I schools participated in quarterly training meetings. In addition, Title I schools have additional personnel who have given both small group and whole group trainings at their local schools. Academic coaches also provided individual support for teachers by coming into classrooms and modeling instructional strategies, working with students, utilizing technology, as well as locating available resources.

Lack of Resources and Personnel

Responses indicated that a lack of resources was extremely problematic for educators. Often, educators would hear great ideas and suggestions at trainings, but did not have the materials to implement lessons with their students. Additional funds to purchase resources specifically for math and language arts would be more effective than listening to a speaker. One challenge that educators face was the coordination of different support staff within a school. Participants discussed how difficult it can often be to effectively communicate with and train all of the personnel that work with students.

Several types of resources were mentioned, including textbooks, hands-on materials, technology, reproducible materials, and resources to share with parents. Differentiation of instructional materials for students of different ability or readiness levels was concerning to participants. Curriculum is designed to prepare students to meet the educational and professional challenges they will face in the future (Parkay, Haas, & Antcil, 2010). Teachers often planned leveled instruction to meet the needs of students who need remediation or extension.

121

Additional requested resources included class sets of novels. Both nonfiction and historical fiction texts were crucial for the in-depth study of science and social studies. Resources allow students to construct, use and retain information (Parkay et al., 2010). Positive impact on student achievement could not be made with several students sharing only a few books or looking at text projected in the front of the room.

A lack of textbooks was noted as a major issue for teachers. The need to collaborate and share among each other was also frequently noted. Participants stated that they know what works and what does not, and they wanted their voices heard more in professional development with respect to their needs. In turn, educators are in need of adequate resources for the ongoing implementation of the Common Core State Standards. Educators use proper resources to facilitate a constructivist environment that supports learning. The teacher is responsible for building a community of learners who have the ability to creatively and collaboratively solve problems (Parkay et al., 2010). Participants also discussed wanting people as resources, such as academic coaches and county level trainers. These coaches and trainers would come into classrooms rather than conduct formal trainings so that teachers can see how standards were supposed to be taught and what the expectations were.

Participants often discussed the benefits that they see with the new standards, but know it will be a process getting to the point where teachers, students, and parents all feel comfortable with the new expectations. Over time, participants indicated that the benefit of both professional development and implementing the new standards would be clearer.

Participants noted that creating materials was a stressor. Often, participants made the point that ready-made materials were not always available for free or that they did not have all the components necessary to gain the desired outcome of the standard. As Powell and Kalina

122

(2009) stated, students need assistance and guidance in processing complex concepts. Teachers spent a significant amount of time creating materials to use. Participants expressed that they wanted to have materials to take away from trainings that were ready to use and not just the ideas.

The Common Core State Curriculum references text evidence as an important component of student mastery. The struggle for teachers has resulted from not having these texts. In relation to curriculum, the Common Core State Standards go deep enough into the content to maximize understanding (Parkay et al., 2010). Participants stated largely that they did not have the novels needed to effectively meet the needs of students. Teachers may have a few copies of novels that they either purchased themselves or borrowed, and would have many students trying to share one text. This practice made classroom management difficult and did not accomplish the goal of exposing students to text. Integrated texts would be one of the best resources teachers could receive to meet the needs of students in language arts and to support the integrated science and social studies curriculums.

Participants reported that they felt uneasy about investing too much time or money in preparing to teach the Common Core State Standards. The permanence of the new standards could not be determined. Therefore, it was difficult for them to commit a great deal of energy to professional development when they were not sure if the objectives would change. Educators indicated that they spent extensive amounts of time searching for materials on the internet and looking at other states' blogs and websites who are already implementing the new standards. Participants discussed that they often conducted their own research to areas to find information and resources to support themselves. Participants would find resources and instructional programs that were effective and request professional development opportunities on programs

they thought were effective for educators to positively impact students. As Kundi and Nawaz (2010) stated, building a bond between teacher and student allowed for productive learning.

Support Needed through the Use of Technology

Incorporating available technology for teachers to participate in webinars, podcasts and live chat discussions was indicated by participants as a way to better utilize individuals' time and to include more people than just those present at a live presentation. Participants further reported that their needs were different based on the age group of students that they were responsible for teaching. Participants who taught fourth and fifth grade discussed the need for more technology related resources; whereas younger age groups needed more hands-on materials. As educators increased their comfort level with implementing the standards, they felt a greater need to network with educators beyond their immediate local schools. Responses indicated that networking at the district level was important within clusters of schools in the same area. Participants also indicated the need to network through the use of technology with other educators in order to maintain consistency and continuity in instruction. As Powell and Kalina (2009) stated, engage students in activities that maximize understanding.

As participants gained an understanding of the Common Core State Standards and received more professional development, they experienced a greater need to expand educational networks. Teachers explained that as they get transfers from other states in the future, the scope, sequence, and content of what is taught will be more consistent so that students are not missing out on important information as a result of moving. Hopefully, this will eliminate educational learning gaps that take place as a child moves from one part of the country to another or from one district to another. In an effort to decrease learning gaps and build new knowledge, constructivism theoretically allows students to make and transfer educational connections from

124

school to school and state to state so that they are acquiring and scaffolding their knowledge regardless of the school system they are attending (Kanvaria, 2010). The effective use of technological resources such as use of webinars, blogs, podcasts, and live chat will all be methods utilized in the future to a greater extent for professional development and connecting educators nationally according to participants.

Technology and conferencing were indicated as crucial components for sharing information and developing meaningful professional development opportunities that educators will want to have in the future. Kundi and Nawaz (2011) stated that educators must constantly refine their practice to remain current with research based practices and ever changing district requirements.

Teachers would often research other states' websites for Common Core State Standards resources. Additionally, teachers often purchased resources online from websites such as Teacher Pay Teachers. Pinterest was mentioned by several participants as a very valuable resource for materials. Unifying local schools through the use of technology tools within the same district and beyond will help to alleviate the differences that many participants described. The need for this connection through the use of technology among schools, districts, and states has given rise to the explosion of websites that participants are accessing on their own, creating a shared learning experience. According to Kanvaria (2010), instruction leads to risk taking, problem solving and a quest for greater knowledge. However, without the opportunity to collaborate about what they were watching, these were not particularly helpful.

Technology was an essential tool identified by participants as a way to meet the time needs of educators. Maximizing our technological resources was a recommended method of reaching the most people in the most efficient use of time. Participants stated that they wanted to

be more connected to other schools within their own cluster and the district. Constructivism plays a role in relation to forming these connections. Parkay et al. (2010) stated, "Constructivist views of learning, therefore, focus on how learners make sense of new information" (p. 192). One method of forming connections for educators is District A's online database of resources. Technology allows for live real time communication between education professions and the respectful use of time of educators and trainers. Connection with other educators through the use of technology to share materials and ideas was an important element of professional development. Further, the ability to be able to access blogs, download materials, and chat with other educators increasing their commitment to the change to the new curriculum. Dialogue is imbedded within collaboration according to Ash (2011).

Recommendations for Professional Development

Positive Impact for Students and Family Connection

Meeting the needs of students is the primary reason for professional development. Ultimately, the goal is to serve students by providing teachers with the tools that they need to be effective communicators and instructors in their classrooms and with students' parents. According to Parkay et al. (2010), "A constructivist curriculum … tends to be integrated, inter-disciplinary and inquiry based" (p. 563). Participants indicated that they thought the objective of student achievement was not aligned with what was taught during professional development trainings. Increased problem solving skills, communication skills and written expression are all essential components of the new standards as stated by participants at Title I and non-Title I schools. A teacher's role is to scaffold instruction based on students' prior knowledge in response to the needs of students (Parkay et al., 2010). Professional development will be an important component of achieving these goals. Professional development must also involve

communication with the family for support and follow through.

Support for New Teachers

Participants also made the point that professional development was important for all educators, but extremely important for new teachers. The support new teachers need should give them opportunities to collaborate with experienced master teachers and provide opportunities for them to get feedback on struggles and successes they are having with their students. Supporting new teachers through mentoring and professional development was seen as a high priority during this transitional time.

Professional Development that is Relevant across the Curriculum

Curriculum integration was also discussed by participants. Educators at Title I schools often indicated that their instructional day was focused on math, language arts instruction, and science, and that social studies content was not a focus. The need to learn subject integration strategies in order to cover all of the required standards within an academic year was discussed as an important need. In essence, participants wanted to be sure they were meeting the needs of their students. Reading instruction was discussed as one of the most important components of instruction for students. Reading instruction and vocabulary development is the foundation for all subject areas. Professional development across the curriculum was identified as a means of effectively training educators on how to meet the needs of students in every subject area. Additionally, students' vocabulary development was an important element of academic success. Educators wanted professional development trainings that helped support this integration primarily through incorporating novels and nonfiction text that helped educators cover social studies and science standards during language arts instruction.

Respectful Use of Educators' Time

Time restraints often posed one of the greatest challenges to participants in regards to professional development. Educators want all professional development opportunities to be respectful of their time. Teachers face the challenge of ensuring that each semester, students practice and master a vast array of standards. In addition, teachers have demands made on their time professionally. Teachers must insure that all of their required paperwork, student responsibilities, assessments, and parent communication are completed in addition to any professional development requirements. Teachers stated that often, they would get useful materials after the time for instruction on that standard has passed. Therefore, in the future, the resources and training teachers obtained this year may be helpful, but it was not at the time of this study, because teachers needed more time to learn and process the information. Educators will needed support with the transition. Educators saw the use of text with increasing complexity across the curriculum as important for American children to become competitive globally (Hiebert & Grisham, 2012).

Collaboration and Professional Development Delivery Models

The "trainers train trainers" model has been a common professional development method within District A for many years. A grade level representative will attend a day-long training and then redeliver information to their grade level team. Most participants indicated that this method is not effective. Teachers indicated that they thought that they would only have training on either math or language arts or important information would be lost in the redelivery. In turn, educators have stated that they felt ill prepared in certain subjects. For example, content teachers often felt ill prepared and lacked the resources to meet the needs of students in all subject areas (Gilles, Wang, Smith, & Johnson, 2013). Participants expressed that they wanted trainers to

come into their classrooms and model with their students best teaching practices.

Teachers reported having a high degree of commitment to professional development if they could receive reassurance that the curriculum shift was a permanent change. Teachers are often highly efficient and committed individuals and wanted to invest their energy in professional development that would be meaningful to them. Most participants felt as though the Common Core State Standards would benefit students over time**.** Some participants reported that they were concerned that it would take several years of a learning curve before students caught up and there were not gaps between grade levels where students have missing skills. However, professional development would be an essential element in improving the process.

Incorporation of Technology in Professional Development

Technology was also present as a theme where professional development could be done more efficiently in order to reach large groups of people with the same information. However, the information could be disseminated to smaller groups at different times. Educators at all schools stated that technology would be an essential part of effective professional development and building professional learning communities. Technology including the internet has revolutionized the way people communicate and learn (Kundi & Nawaz, 2010.

The following graphics in figures 5.1 and 5.2 illustrate the responsibilities placed on educators as well as recommendations for professional development identified in this study.
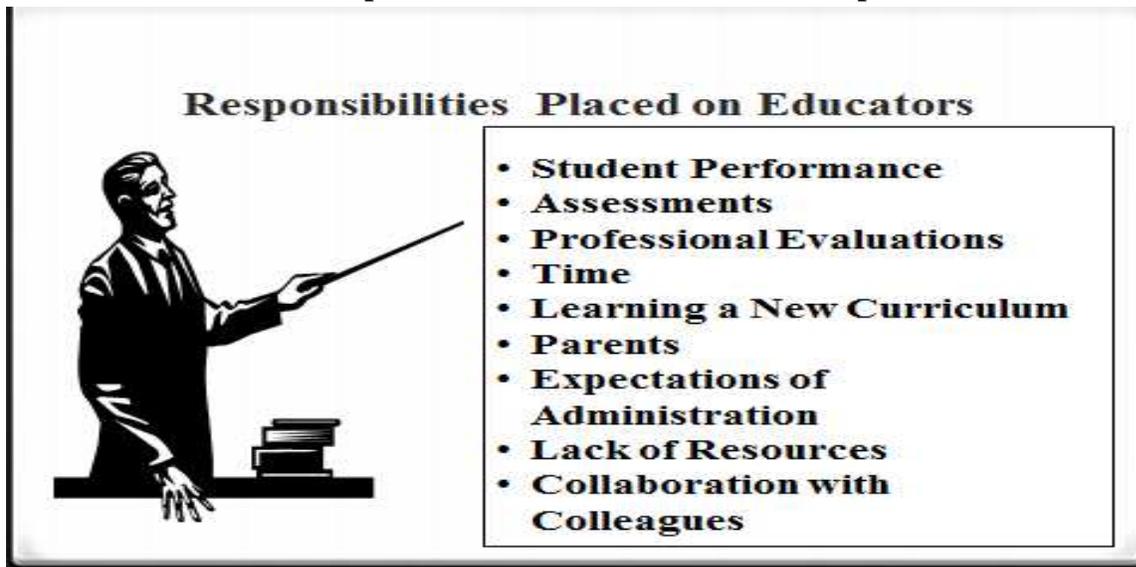
Figure 5.1. Responsibilities Placed on Educators, Instructor with Pointer, (n.d.). Source: Microsoft Power Point Clipart

Figure 5.2. Educator Recommendations for Effective Professional Development, Laptop and Agreement Images, (n.d.). Source: Microsoft Power Point Clipart

Limitations and Recommendations

This study had limitations. The participating 14 educators voluntarily participated and

were not required by their principals. As Yin (2009) emphasized, a case study requires extensive time and data. However, participants who are interested in taking on additional tasks and responsibilities are often highly motivated participants who might have a more specific view than the general population. All participants were highly engaged and wanted to give an accurate reflection of their position during interviews, focus groups, and reflective journaling.

Another limitation could be potential bias due to my occupation. I am currently a teacher in District A. I did not teach at the same school as any of the participants in the study, nor do I have any position of authority over them. According to Yin (2009), the researcher takes advantage of all opportunities and makes every effort to reduce bias. As the sole researcher, I made every effort to eliminate any elements of bias during all my communication with participants and in my reporting of the data.

Recommendations for Future Research

Additional research is recommended on the topic of teachers' perceptions in regards to the Common Core State Standards and professional development. Professional development in relationship to the CCSS is an important educational goal that should be monitored and followed over an extended period of time. There may be a benefit to revisiting the topic of professional development and the CCSS at a later stage of implementation in order to compare and contrast the results of this study with later studies.

A quantitative study measuring student achievement could be valuable future research, as it could provide additional insight on the topic through the use of statistical analysis. A study designed to monitor student achievement over a period of time is recommended to determine the effectiveness of both new standards and professional development. A clear definition of student proficiency in math and language arts would need to be outlined to add

131

clarity and specificity to all studies. It is also recommended that this study be replicated in other states in order to compare the results and determine if other states and systems have had similar experiences with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and professional development.

Future research is also recommended in regards to the effective use of technology for training, communication with families, and instructional purposes in regards to implementing the Common Core State Standards. Additional research in regards to fostering better communication with parents in supporting students with applying the standards across the curriculum would be important.

Additional research which examines the use of mentoring and modeling would also provide information on effective professional development strategies. Research on how to implement effective professional development and methods to support both new and experienced teachers with the process of implementing the Common Core State Standards throughout the United States would have long term value.

Conclusion

The purpose of this multiple case study was to analyze teachers' perceptions of the implementation of the Common Core State Standards in District A during the 2012-2013 academic school year. Theme analyses were conducted to determine if there were common components in participants' responses. The overarching themes were an important topic in all forms of data collection, which included educators' perceptions on types of support needed, educators' reactions to the curriculum shift, and educators' perceptions on their expected responsibilities. Participants indicated for future professional development within District A, teachers wanted to utilize the available technology more effectively for this purpose to include

blogs, websites, webinars, live chat, and streaming of information. Participants stated that they want their time to be respected as professional development trainings are planned, and that a combination of trainings during and after school was important. Educators preferred frequent opportunities for collaboration as a method of effective training within their district, state, and nation. Participants suggested that District A, other school districts, and the state be organized in their efforts to best meet the needs of students. Research indicated that professional development should involve all staff that worked with students in a coordinated effort. It was recommended that learning networks be developed through the use of technology to connect educators virtually. All professional development was expected to be organized, current, timely, and relevant. Educators expected modeling and professional development to be application rather than just theory. Educators also expected resources to be available for themselves and for students as a part of effective professional development practices.

REFERENCES

Achieve, Education First, & U.S. Education Delivery Institute. (2012). *Common core feedback*

    tool – for educators [Survey]. Retrieved from http://www.deliveryinstitute.org/

    publications/feedback-loops-common-core-state-standards-implementation

Agreement Image. [Microsoft Power Point Clipart]. (n.d.).

Anderson, L. (2011). A learning resource for effective mentorship. *Nursing Standard, 25*(51),

    48-50. Retrieved from http://nursingstandard.rcnpublishing.co.uk/

Anonymous. (2010). Effective content focused professional development. *Journal of Staff*

    Development, 31(5), 5-6.

Ash, K. (2011). Prepping for the common core: Educators plan to share resources across state

    and district lines. *Education Week*, *31*(9), 7-8. Retrieved from

    http://www.edweek.org/ew/index.html

Auerbach, C. F., & Silverstein, L. B. (2003). *Qualitative data: An introduction to coding and*

    analysis. New York, NY: New York University Press.

Beach, R. (2011). Issues in analyzing alignment of language arts common core standards with

    state standards. *Educational Researcher, 40*, 179-182. doi: 10.3102/0013189X11410055

Bomer, B., & Maloch, B. (2011). Relating policy to research and practice: The common core

    standards. *Language Arts*, *89*, 38-43. Retrieved from http://www.ncte.org/journals/la

Bray, J. (2011). CTE's link to the common core. *Techniques, 56*(7), 6. Retrieved from

    https://www.acteonline.org/techniques.aspx

Cano, J. (2006). Essentials for effective professional development. *The Agricultural Education*

    Magazine, 79(2), 2-2. Retrieved from http://www.naae.org/links/agedmagazine/

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

achievement. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Chalmers, L., & Keown, P. (2006). Communities of practice and professional development.

International Journal of Lifelong Education. 25, 139-156. doi:

10.1080/02601370500510793

Cidell, J. (2010). Content clouds as exploratory data analysis. *Area, 42*, 514-523. doi:

10.1111/j.1475-4762.2010.00952.x

Cogan, L., Schmidt, W., & Houang, R. (2013). Implementing the common core state

standards for mathematics: what parents know and support. *The Education Policy

Center at Michigan State*, (3), 1-8.

Conley, D. (2011). Building on the common core. *Educational Leadership*, *86*(6), 16-20.

Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx

Cooper, J. D. (2002). Learner-Centered Professional development: An effective research-

based model. *Houghton Mifflin Harcourt*. Englewood, CO: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Retrieved from http://www.hmheducation.com/professionaldevelopment/

Council of Chief State School Officers. (2012). National governors association and state

education chiefs launch common state academic standards [Press release]. Retrieved from

http://www.ccsso.org/News_and_Events/Press_Releases/NATIONAL_GOVERNORS_A

SSOCIATION_AND_STATE_EDUCATION_CHIEFS_LAUNCH_COMMON_STATE

_ACADEMIC_STANDARDS_.html

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*

(2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Cunningham, P., & Allington, R. (2011). *Classrooms that work: They can all read and write* (5th

ed.)*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Daggett, W., & Gendron, S. (2010). Common core state standards initiative: Classroom

implications for 2014. *The International Center for Leadership in Education: White Papers.* Retrieved from http://www.leadered.com/whitepapers.html

Ediger, M. (2011). Assisting pupils in mathematics achievement (the common core standards). *Journal of Instructional Psychology. 38*(3), 154-156. Retrieved from http://www.questia.com/library/p6137/journal-of-instructional-psychology

Ferguson, R. (2006). Five challenges to effective teacher professional development. *Journal of Staff Development. 27*(4), 48-52. Retrieved from http://www.learningforward.org/ publications/jsd

Finkelstein, N. D., Klarin, B., Olson, M., Austin, K., Dadgar, M., Mundry, S., & Bugler, D. (2013). *Core to College evaluation: Implementing the CommonCore State Standards: Articulating course sequences across K–12 and higher educationsystems*. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

Fosnot, C.T. (2005). *Constructivism: Theory, perspectives and practice* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: The Teachers College Press.

Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2007). *Educational research: An introduction* (8th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson International.

Gilgun, J. F. (2010). The intellectual roots of grounded theory. *Current Issues in Qualitative Research, 1*(9), 1-7.

Gilgun, J. F. (2011a). *Coding in deductive qualitative analysis.* [Amazon Digital Services version]. Retrieved from http://www.amazon.com/kindle/dp/B004KAAV2I/ ref=rdr_kindle_ext_eos_detail

Gilgun, J. F. (2011b). Theory and case study research. *Current Issues in Qualitative Research, 2*(3), 1-6.

Gilles, C., Wang, Y., Smith, J., & Johnson, D. (2013). "I'm no longer just teaching history."

    Professional development for teaching common core state standards for literacy in social

    studies. *Middle School Journal, 44*(3), 34-43.

Ginn, J. (2010, September/October). States find common (core) ground. *Capitol Ideas,* 1-3.

    Retrieved from http://www.csg.org/pubs/capitolideas/index.aspx

Glaser, B. G. (1998) *Doing Grounded Theory*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for*

    Qualitative Research. New York, NY: Aldine.

Griffith, P. (2011). Catching up with the common core. *Educational Leadership*, *68*(6), 95-95.

    Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership.aspx

Guba, E. G. (1981). ERIC/ECTJ annual review paper: Criteria for assessing the

    trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology,*

    29(2), 75-91.

Gulamhussein, A. (2013, September 1). Teaching the teachers. *Center for public*

    education. Retrieved January 19, 2014, from http://www.centerforpubliceducation.org/

    teachingtheteachers

Guskey, T. R. (2002). Does it make a difference? Evaluating professional development.

    Educational Leadership, *59*(6), 45-51. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org/publications/

    educational-leadership.aspx

Guskey, T. R. (2009). Closing the knowledge gap on effective professional development.

    Educational Horizons, 87, 224-233. Retrieved from http://pilambda.org/benefits/

    publications/educational-horizons/

Heitin, L. (2013, October 7). 1. *Education Week Org*. Retrieved December 20, 2013, from

    http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_now/2013/10/nearly_every_teacher_in_the.html

Henkin, R., Harmon, P., Pate, E., & Moormon, H. (2009). On a quest for new discoveries:

Effective professional development. *Voices from the Middle, 16*(4), 7-8. Retrieved from

http://www.ncte.org/journals/vm/

Herbert, J., & Rubin, I. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.).

Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Hiebert, E. H., & Grisham, D. (2012). What literacy teachers need to know about supporting

teachers in understanding text complexity within the common core state standards.

Journal of Reading Education, 37(3), 5-12.

Johnson, C.C. (2006). Effective professional development and change in practice: Barriers

science teachers encounter and implications for reform. *School Science and Mathematics,*

106, 150-161. doi: 10.1111/j.1949-8594.2006.tb18172.x

Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm

whose time has come. *Educational Researcher, 33*(7), 14–26. doi:

10.3102/0013189X033007014

Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (2002). *Student achievement through staff development* (3rd ed.).

Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Kanvaria, V. K. (2010). *Constructivism and the constructivist pedagogy of mathematics in the*

21st century [Amazon Digital Services version]. Retrieved from http://www.amazon.com

Kaufman, R. C., & Ring, M. (2011). Pathways to leadership and professional development:

Inspiring Novice Special Educators. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 43*(5), 52-60.

Retrieved from http://www.cec.sped.org/am/template.cfm?section=Home

Kern, D. (2011). Elections, comets, and common core standards. *New England Reading*

Association Journal, 46(2), 89-92. Retrieved from http://www.nereading.org/

Koehnecke, D. S. (2001). Professional development schools provide effective theory and practice. *Education*, *121,* 589-592.

Kundi, G. M., & Nawaz, A. (2010). From objectivism to social constructivism: The impacts of information and communication technologies (ICTs) on higher education. *Journal of Science and Technology Education Research, 1*(2), 30-36. Retrieved from http://www.academicjournals.org/JSTER/

Laptop Image. [Microsoft Power Point Clipart]. (n.d.).

LeCompte, M. D. (2000). Analyzing qualitative data. *Theory Into Practice, 39*, 146–154. doi: 10.1207/s15430421tip3903_5

Locke, M. (2012). Core changes. *Scholastic Administrator*, *11*, 47-49.

Lewin, T. (2010, July 21). Many states adopt national standards for their schools. *New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Observation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Malburg, S., & Lorcher, T. (2012, October 17). Understanding the Basics of Title 1 Funds. Retrieved from http://www.brighthubeducation.com/teaching-methods-tips/11105-basics-of-title-1-funds/

Marcoux, E. (2012). Common core and technology. *Teacher Librarian, 39*(3), 68-69. Retrieved from http://www.teacherlibrarian.com/

Margett, J. M., & Pullin, D. (2010). Social science and the courts: Challenges and strategies for bridging gaps between law and research. *Educational Researcher, 39*, 515-520. doi: 10.3102/0013189X10383334

Mathis, W. J. (2010). *The common core standards initiative: An effective reform tool?* Retrieved from http://epicpolicy.org/publication/common-core-standards

McLaughlin, M., & Overturf, B. J. (2012). The common core: Insights into the K-5 standards. *Reading Teacher, 66,* 153-164. doi: 10.1002/TRTR.01115

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Miller, P. (2011). *Theories of developmental psychology* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Worth Publishers.

Morris, R. J. (2012). Find where you fit in the common core, or the time I forgot about librarians and reading. *Teacher Librarian, 39*(5), 8-12.

Nagel, D. (2013, September 10). THE Journal. *Report: Effective Teacher Professional Development Crucial to Common Core.* Retrieved January 19, 2014, from http://thejournal.com/articles/2013/09/10/report-effective-teacher-professional-development-crucial-to-common-core.aspx?m=2#hGrhgV4mk6dRiPLq.99

Owocki, G. (2012). *The common core lesson book K-12: Working with increasingly complex literature, informational text, and foundational reading skills.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

Parkway, F. W., Hass, G., & Antcil, E. J. (2010). *Curriculum leadership: Readings for developing quality educational programs* (9th ed.). Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers [PARCC]. (2012). *PARCC assessment design.* Retrieved from http://www.parcconline.org/

Patrick, S. (2011). Common core Q & A. *Education Week*, *30*(15), 2. Retrieved from http://www.edweek.org/ew/index.html

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Phillips, V., & Wong, C. (2010). Tying together the common core of standards, instruction, and assessments. *Phi Delta Kappan 91*(5), 37-42. Retrieved from http://www.kappanmagazine.org/

Porter, A., McMaken, J., Hwang, J., & Yang, R. (2011). Common core standards: The new U.S. intended curriculum. *Educational Researcher*, *40*, 103-116. doi: 10.3102/0013189X11405038

Postholm, M. B. (2012). Teachers' professional development: A theoretical review. *Educational Research, 54*, 405-429. doi: 10.1080/00131881.2012.734725

Powell, K. C., & Kalina, C. J. (2009). Cognitive and social constructivism: Developing tools for an effective classroom. *Education, 130,* 241-250.

Riddile, M. (2012, March). What's new about the common core standards? *Principal Leadership.* 39-42. Retrieved from http://www.nassp.org/tabid/2043/default.aspx

Santos, M., Darling-Hammond, L., & Cheuk, T. (2012). *Teacher development to support English language learners in the context of Common Core State Standards*. Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Understanding Language Initiative.

School Improvement Network. (2011). Answering common concerns with common core 360: Common core 360 provides a roadmap for implementing the common core standards [Press release]. Retrieved from http://www.schoolimprovement.com/company/news/answering-common-concerns-with-common-core-360/

Stake, R.E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Teacher with Pointer Image. [Microsoft Power Point Clipart]. (n.d.).

Teacher Pointing at Board Image. [Microsoft Power Point Clipart]. (n.d.).

Tienken, C. H. (2010). Common core state standards: I wonder? *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, *47*, 14-
17. doi: 10.1080/00228958.2010.10516554

Wiener, R. (2013). Teaching to the core: Integrating implementation of Common Core and
teacher effectiveness policies. *The Aspen Institute*. Retrieved January 19, 2014, from
http://www.ccsso.org/documents/2013/teachingtothecore.pdf

Williams, P. R., Tabernick, A. M., & Krivak, T. (2009). The power of leadership, collaboration,
and professional development: The story of the SMART consortium. *Education and
Urban Society, 41*, 437-456. doi: 10.1177/0013124509331606

Wurman, Z., & Wilson, S. W. (2012). The common core math standards. *Education Next, 12*(3),
45-50

Yin, R. K. (2009). C*ase study research and design and method.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE
Publications, Inc.

APPENDIX A: PROCEDURES

- Information was gathered from 14 individual educators in different schools in a North Metro school district in Georgia.

- I used a template to record anecdotal observations notes during focus groups and interviews.

- I used audio and video equipment to record observations and field interviews and focus groups.

- Audio from field interviews and focus groups was transcribed.

- Educators participating in the study submitted an electronic reflective journal to me at the conclusion of the data collection phase.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Discuss your interpretation of the purpose of the curriculum change to the Common Core standards.

2. How knowledgeable do you feel about the content of the new standards?

3. Do you prefer whole group staff development training where you can observe and listen or do you prefer small group trainings where you can participate and interact with others?

4. Do you think there will be a need for new or additional instructional resources aligned with the new standards? If so, what resources?

5. Do you feel opportunities to network with other educators will be important at the district level? If so, what opportunities specifically?

6. Are opportunities to network with other educators important at the state level? If so, what opportunities would you prefer?

7. What professional development opportunities to network with other educators will be important at the national level?

8. What are your thoughts on the permanence of the curriculum shift to the Common Core State Standards?

9. What is the professional development support level for the curriculum shift in your opinion? Do you think there will be strong support for the curriculum shift? If so what kind of support?

10. Explain your thoughts on if you think professional development on the Common Core State Standards will be an important component of meeting the needs of students.

11. What, if any, are your main areas of concern in regards to implementing the Common Core Standards?

12. Explain what types of professional development opportunities you would like to see offered.

13. How would you recommend resources and strategies be shared among educators and schools

within the district?

14. What professional development resources do you think should be offered to support you

during this transition?

15. Please, share any comments or concerns that you may have in regards to the implementation

of the Common Core State Standards and professional development.

APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What is your comfort level with the transition to Common Core State Standards?

2. How prepared do you feel to implement the Common Core State Standards in your classroom with the amount of professional development you have received?

3. Do you think professional development opportunities should provide opportunities for cross grade level communication? If so, what types of opportunities would you prefer?

4. Have you participated in professional development on the Common Core State Standards? Can you describe the activities at the training?

5. Who provided the professional development training you have participated in?

6. Are you familiar with resources outside your district to support you with the process of implementing the Common Core State Standards in your classroom?

7. What do you believe will be the greatest challenge in implementing the Common Core State Standards in your district?

8. What is your understanding of the meaning "Career and College Readiness" for students?

9. What is your understanding of the available resources available to you on the Common Core State Standards that are not part of a formal training?

10. What would be the most valuable professional development opportunity that you would request, if any?

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT CRITERIA CHECKLIST

Name_____

_____ I have at least 5 years teaching experience

_____ I teach at the elementary school level 2-5 grade level_____

_____ I teach within District A: school_____

_____ I have taught the Georgia Performance Standards

_____ I am actively implementing the Common Core State Standards

_____ I teach at a Title I school

_____I teach at a non-Title I school

_____ I am will to voluntarily participate

APPENDIX E: WITHDRAW FROM RESEARCH FORM

Dear Participant,

      Participants can withdraw from the study at any point. Individuals' contributions to the focus groups, interviews or journals will be removed from the content of the study. No photographs, videos, or audio tracks will be included in the study. Only transcribed audio will be included in the body of the study with the signed consent of active participants. If you choose to withdraw your participation from the study please sign and date this form and return your form to the address below.

I wish to withdraw my participation in the study:

EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS
AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Name _____

Signature_____

Date_____

Return form to:

Christine Anne Hipsher

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW/FOCUS GROUP SCRIPT

Researcher:

Good afternoon and welcome to our interview/focus group session. I appreciate you taking the time to join me to discuss the current implementation of the Common Core State Standards and professional development. My name is Christine Hipsher and I am the principal researcher in this study. I am having discussions like this with approximately 25 teachers within our district in order to gain some insight on the perceptions that teachers have with the current curriculum shift.

Please know there are no wrong or right answers to these questions, but rather an opportunity to share your point of view. Please feel free to share your point of view even if it differs from another person. I am interested in all comments not just positive ones.

I will be audio taping the session today. I am taping because I want to be focused on your comments and discussion and not on taking notes. I will be transcribing the audio from today's session. During our interview/focus group we will be on a first name basis. However, I will not use any names in the reported research.

Researcher:

Interview/ focus group questions will be asked and recorded after the introduction. Interview/focus group are included with the application documents.

Researcher:

I appreciate your time today. Thank you for your willingness to voluntarily participate in this interview/focus group. All of the reported results from this study will be available upon the completion of this study. I will share with the completed study at the time it is completed. Have a wonderful, day and feel free to contact me with any questions or concern you may have. You may call or email me using the contact information I have provided you.

APPENDIX G: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Dear Potential Participant,

You are invited to participate in a research study that seeks to gain insight into teachers' perceptions regarding the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and professional development. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to determine what types of professional development opportunities educators in our district would like to have in regards to the implementation of the newly developed Common Core State Standards during the 2012-2013 academic year and in the future. In addition you will have the opportunity to voice your comments and concerns, and help to decide on effective ways to share and collaborate with each other during this process. Participants in the study will participate in one focus group, one interview and maintain an electronic reflective journal. Participants may elect to only to participate in part or all data collection activities.

If you are interested in participating please complete the participation checklist and consent form to Christine Hipsher in the attached self-addressed and stamped envelope. Your contributions to the study will be valuable and will take minimal time. The study will allow teachers to share their perceptions, concerns, wants, and successes in regards to professional development and the Common Core State Standards. I appreciate your time and interest and I look forward to working with you should you decide to participate. Attached to this letter are the following documents for your review. Please, contact me with any questions you may have via email or phone.

Attached:
Informed Consent
Withdrawal Form

Kind Regards,
Christine Hipsher

APPENDIX H: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of study: EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING COMMON CORE STATE

STANDARDS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Principal investigator's name: Christine Anne Hipsher

Liberty University
Academic department: Department of Education

You are invited to be in a research study. The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to determine what types of professional development opportunities educators in our district would like to have in regards to the implementation of the newly developed Common Core State Standards during the 2012-2013 academic year and in the future. In addition educators will have the opportunity to voice their comments and concerns, and help to decide on effective ways to share and collaborate with each other during this process.

You were selected as a possible participant because you meet the following criteria. All participants will have at least five years teaching experience. All of the participants will be currently teaching at an elementary school grade levels three through five. Individuals participating in the study will be required to have taught the Georgia Performance Standards as well as currently be implementing the Common Core State Standards. Some of the participants will be teaching at a Title I school and some will not, however both groups will be represented in the participants. Participation in the study will be voluntary and not based on principal recommendation. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by; Christine Anne Hipsher, Department of Education.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is: The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to determine what types of professional development opportunities educators in our district would like to have in regards to the implementation of the newly developed Common Core State Standards during the 2012-2013 academic year and in the future. In addition educators will have the opportunity to voice their comments and concerns, and help to decide on effective ways to share and collaborate with each other during this process.

I have taught for 18 years. I have experience in third grade, fourth grade and fifth grade. Eight years of my teaching experience have been in an inclusion special education setting. I serve in the classroom, as a teacher leader, and as a professional who trains college students for academic success and employment skills. My role as researcher in the study will be reporting the results from focus groups, reflective journals and field interviews. Additionally, as a researcher, I will share the reported data with the school district for informational and staff development purposes.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

Participants in the study will participate in one focus group, one interview and maintain an electronic reflective journal. Interviews and focus groups will take approximately 30 minutes each session. Participants will spend varying amounts of time reflecting in their journals depending on the information they are choosing to share. Journals are intended not to be time consuming, but an outlet to share thoughts on the Common Core State Standards and professional development as issues or opportunities happen. Participants may elect to only to participate in part or all data collection activities. Participants will be audio recorded, and data collection will take place over a four to six week period.

Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has minimal risks: The risks to participants involved in the study are no greater than everyday activities. Participation in the study will involve participants sharing their experiences related to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

The benefits to participation include possible insight into effective professional development practices in relation to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards.

Compensation:

You will not receive monetary compensation for your participation.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records.

I will secure all of the data collected during the research process by keeping all of the audio, transcripts and artifacts in a locked file cabinet and password protected on my computer. Individuals will not be identified within the study by name, but rather a pseudonym. Individuals will have the option to be identified on artifacts or other items they contribute in order to receive credit for their original or self-developed teaching materials. Individuals participating in focus groups will be aware of one another's identity.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect

your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships. Participants can withdraw from the study at any point. Attached to this application is the "Withdraw from the Study" form. Individuals' contributions to the focus groups, interviews or journals will be removed from the content of the study. No photographs, videos, or audio tracks will be included in the study. Only transcribed audio will be included in the body of the study.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Christine Anne Hipsher. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her (original form has contact information, but this was omitted for publication). If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board (original form has contact information, but this was omitted for publication). ***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study. I understand that the outlined study will involve audio recording, and I give my consent for audio recording.

Please check box if you give your consent to be audio recorded:

☐

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____

IRB Code Numbers:

IRB Expiration Date:

APPENDIX I: IRB APPROVAL

LIBERTY
U N I V E R S I T Y™

The Graduate School at Liberty University

March 27, 2013

Christine Anne Hipsher
IRB Approval 1537.032713: Educators' Perceptions Regarding Common Core State Standards and Professional Development

Dear Christine,

We are pleased to inform you that your above study has been approved by the Liberty IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,