

The Common Core State Standards and the Previous NYS Standards

Case Study: What Can We Learn About the Math and ELA Common Core State Standards and
the Previous NYS Standards through Lessons Conducted with One Child?

Sara A. Wright

The College at Brockport, State University of New York

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Abstract

This paper examines research concerning the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the previous NYS Standards. The authors of the different articles presented in this literature review Main (2011), Wurman & Wilson (2012), Liebttag (2013), Conley (2014), and McLaughlin & Overturf (2012), take different stances as to whether or not the Common Core is beneficial for our students or detrimental to our students as they progress through school. The ultimate goal of the CCSS is for students to be college and career ready. This paper explores the English Language Arts (ELA) and Math Common Core State Standards and previous NYS Standards through lessons conducted with a fourth-grade child. After conducting the case study, the findings were that neither set of standards provide the level of challenge the child needs; both sets of standards need to allow more time for creativity and hands-on learning opportunities; the child preferred the previous NYS Standard math lessons I created over the Common Core math lessons; and lastly, in contrast, the child preferred the Common Core ELA lessons versus the previous NYS ELA lessons I created.

Keywords: Common Core State Standards, Math, ELA, previous NYS standards

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Chapter 1

Being an educator is one of the most important professions in the world. Without educators and education, we wouldn't have doctors, lawyers, law enforcement, government officials, or any type of professions that help our society function properly together as a whole. Children are the future and as educators, we must do everything we can to ensure our children are well educated and prepared for the world they will encounter.

Hearing the words, Common Core, what comes to mind? Is the Common Core curriculum going to prepare our children and students for the real-world? Administrators, educators, and parents all have their own opinions. However, has anyone ever thought about the students' opinions and thoughts about Common Core? Shouldn't the students have a say in what they are learning and how the instruction is being implemented?

Problem Statement

What are the Common Core State Standards? The Common Core State Standards are the standards adopted by most school districts in the United States intended to provide clear academic benchmarks with more concise academic standards that will prepare students to be career and college ready (Liebtag, 2013, p. 56). However, is it fair to say that the Common Core State Standards focus solely on preparing students to be college and career ready? Why do students have to be college and career ready? Why not just prepare students to be life-long learners, responsible citizens, and be able to prosper in the ever changing society we live in?

Teachers are still trying to familiarize themselves with the Common Core State Standards and figure out how to effectively implement the instruction in a way that meets all of their students' needs. According to Michalec (2013), "Many of the day-to-day activities in teacher education and teacher professional development are devoted to structure, programmatic, and curricular responsibilities linked with the teacher accountability and standards movements" (p. 27). What about engagement, imagination, and creativity?

When asked, many teachers will say that there is very little time for creativity. The Common Core State Standards are written in a concise, structured, but rigorous manner. When the Common Core standards emerged, teachers were expected to know how to teach the standards right away; it was mandatory. Teachers were never taught how to implement the standards but were mandated to do so. As a newer teacher, the CCSS are all I have ever known. I was required to write lesson plans during my undergraduate studies from the previous NYS Standards, but as for actually being in a classroom with my own students, I have only truly taught from the CCSS. With this said, I can't imagine all of the adjustments that older generation teachers have had to make; especially without being taught how to implement the new CCSS. If teachers are not confident in their instruction and effectively implementing the Common Core, what impact could this have on our students? Is it fair to have teachers try to teach our children and students if the teachers are not fully educated in what they are expected to teach? Will students ever be able to voice their opinions?

Significance of the Problem

Educational standards are not new. They have existed for many years and educators rely on the standards to guide their instruction. I agree with Conley (2014) that educational standards can help ensure that students in every school have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and

skills critical to success. When developed and implemented properly, students will have access to an education they will need to be successful in life (p. 3). I believe the Common Core State Standards have the right intentions but in the way they are structured, the Common Core leaves little to no room for creativity to make learning fun and meaningful.

The goal of education is to prepare students for the future and the focus of education should always be placed on our students. “Over the past 30 years, we have seen three major reform efforts shape American educational policy and implementation: A Nation at Risk, No child Left Behind Act, and now, the Common Core State Standards” (Steadman & Evans, 2013, p. 1). I believe all of these reform efforts have focused on the best interests of students. However, the Common Core State Standards have proven to be challenging for both teachers and students due to the rigorous demands of the standards. The goal of the Common Core State Standards is that “all students will be prepared for further learning and work in a competitive global economy regardless of the sociodemographic variation associated with their neighborhood or school (Kornhaber, Griffith, & Tyler, 2014, p. 2). Although the Common Core State Standards may be challenging, teachers must continue educating themselves through their own research and professional development opportunities. It is the teacher’s responsibility to develop meaningful instructional tasks to motivate students and enable them to meet the standards. The only way for educators to truly learn how to effectively teach the Common Core is to continue educating themselves, collaborate with other professionals, and ask questions.

The Common Core State Standards are new and may not be viewed positively by everyone; however, it is required and as professionals, we need to invest ourselves and learn as much as we can in order to produce life-long learners within our students. Children are our future and their opinions matter. This research study is important because it may help me as an

educator learn from a student's point of view. From this study, I hope to determine which set of standards the student prefers and why, but also learn how I can better create effective lessons that will enrich the minds of my students.

Purpose

Over the past few years there has been a lot of discussion and debate about the NYS Common Core State Standards. As a new teacher, I have been forced to jump right in and start teaching the Common Core. I never had the luxury of teaching the previous state standards so I can't compare the two standards like many older generation teachers. For my research project, I chose to conduct a case study with a fourth-grade student. The purpose of this study was to have the opportunity to create meaningful lesson plans from the previous NYS Standards and the Common Core State Standards in both ELA and Math, and have the student determine which set of standards he prefers and why. The purpose of this case study was to determine which set of standards the student prefers and to learn how best to implement different lessons.

Research Question

My research question for my capstone project is as follows: What can we learn about the Math and ELA Common Core State Standards, and the previous NYS teaching standards through lessons conducted with one child?

Rationale

I chose to conduct a case study with one child because it allowed me to work one-on-one and really focus on the child, the lessons, and the data I collected. I wanted my project and data to be meaningful therefore, I believe that focusing on one child would allow me to gain the best results and answer my research question. As a young, new teacher, I don't have the experience that the older generation teachers have of teaching from the previous NYS standards. I have

mixed feelings regarding the Common Core and have always wondered what a child/student thinks and how he/she feels about the standards. I was excited about creating and implementing Math and ELA lesson plans from both set of standards. I was also interested to see which set of standards the fourth-grade student preferred and why, and what I would learn and take away from my project.

Study Approach

For my research study I chose to conduct a case study with a fourth-grade student. The child completed a series of 12 lessons. Three lessons were based on the Common Core Math Standards, three lessons were based on the previous NYS Math standards, three lessons were based on the Common Core ELA standards, and three lessons were based on the previous NYS ELA standards. From all of the lessons, I hoped to learn as much as I could about the Common Core State Standards and the previous NYS Standards.

The data collection took place over a six week period. I met with the child once a week where he completed two lessons. One lesson was Common Core and one was from the previous NYS Standards. The lessons took anywhere from 25 to 45 minutes each thus the child was given a break between the two lessons each time we met. Once the data collection period was complete, I took time to read through the data, analyze it, gather my thoughts, and then write what I had learned from the data I collected.

Summary

The Common Core State Standards have proven to be a challenge for many teachers. The Common Core claims to be what's best for our students. However, has anyone ever thought to ask our students what they think is best for them or what they think about the things they are

being taught, or forced to do in school? Through my project, I intended to listen to the student and let the student tell me what he thought about the standards and why.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Whether positive or negative, everyone seems to have their own opinions about the Common Core State Standards. President Obama and the former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan have embraced the Common Core State Standards and described them as “transforming American education” (Robbins, 2013, p. 9). However, did our country really need a new set of teaching/learning standards? What was wrong with the previous teaching standards that each state followed? Why did NYS adopt the CCSS? Stephen Krashen believes there was never a need for the Common Core State Standards. He continues by saying that the Common Core controls what is taught and tests students to ensure that the standards are being taught (Krashen, 2014, p.37).

My case study was an investigation that explored the Common Core State Standards and the previous NYS Standards in order to learn as much as I could about each set of standards through lessons conducted with one student. For this section of my writing, I have broken my research into five different subsections: The Common Core State Standards, Equity, ELA, Math, and Motivation/Engagement. For each subsection, I explain the research and findings that I have found regarding the Common Core State Standards.

The Common Core State Standards

As far as I can remember, elementary education, especially in the younger grades (K-2), focused mainly on counting, letters, sounds, and most importantly, having fun! After talking with my parents, grandparents, and other adults, they remember just learning numbers, letters, and having naptime and playtime. However, as times have changed and as the Common Core

State Standards have been adopted, there has been a giant shift in the way education is taught today.

Since the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, many people like the change while other people have negative views and opinions about Common Core. I did a lot of substitute teaching in several different school districts and I heard different conversations, views, and opinions from other teachers about the Common Core State Standards. Most all of the teachers had negative comments, especially the older generation teachers who have taught the previous NYS Standards for many years. I have wondered if those teachers didn't like the Common Core State Standards for actual concrete reasons, or if they just didn't like the change and having to take time to learn new information and new ways of implementation.

No matter what the answer may be, it is safe to say that educational standards are not new. Educational standards have existed for many years and help guide teachers as to “the knowledge and skills students need to master at each grade level and in specified courses or subject areas to be successful” (Conley, 2014, p. 3). Conley continues by explaining that educational standards help prepare students to be successful in college, career, and in life (p. 3). Ideally, educational standards ensure that teachers know exactly what objectives to teach, meaning clear expectations, and ultimately, equity.

According to Wallender (2014) policymakers created common educational standards and increased rigor in schools in order to prepare all students for college or careers in the 21st century, and to help the United States strive for and surpass educational excellence (p. 9). ‘Career and College readiness’ is a phrase I hear a lot when the Common Core State Standards are mentioned. What does this mean? To me, it means that our only job as teachers is to follow the structure of the Common Core State Standards so that our students can leave school and enter

college or jump right into a career and be successful. Should this be our goal as teachers?

According to the standards document, the Common Core State Standards encompass multiple appealing characteristics which is why most of the United States has adopted the CCSS. The standards document expresses that the CCSS are “aligned with college and work expectations; are clear and consistent; are evidence-based; include rigorous content; and are informed by other top-performing countries so that all students are prepared to succeed in our global economy and society” (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012, p. 153). The Common Core State Standards push our children and students to a high level of learning and understanding all under one set of common standards. So what does it mean for our students to be career and college ready? According to the creators of Common Core, students who are college and career ready are characterized as being independent thinkers; being able to effectively respond to various tasks and problems; being able to comprehend difficult situations, perspectives, and cultures; and being able to use technology and digital media appropriately and effectively (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). From the characteristics just listed, we can expect that students will be prepared to enter college or enter into a career and be successful if teachers educate and instill these characteristics in students.

Before moving on, I want to talk about teachers and the implementation of the Common Core State Standards. As a teacher, I am passionate about my student’s learning, about teaching, and I am willing to try new methods/techniques and partake in professional development opportunities in order to continue my education as a life-long learner; something I hope to instill in my students. Michalec (2013) uses the term “inner core” as “short-hand for a constellation of teaching qualities that characterize the inner life of teachers including: calling, emotion, affect, dispositions, heart, self-knowing, and passion” (p. 29). Being passionate and caring about your

students are perhaps the most important qualities of being a great teacher. The Common Core State Standards are challenging for students and push students to a higher level of learning. The goal is not standardization, but higher achievement. “This needs to occur while simultaneously preserving and even energizing the local diversity and creativity that is the hallmark of the best of the U.S. educational system and what makes it unique in the world” (Conley, 2014, p.13).

Lastly, there has been a lot of discussion about implementing the Common Core State Standards. From conversations I have had with other teachers and co-workers, when NYS adopted the Common Core State Standards, teachers were never taught how to effectively teach and implement the standards. This created a huge problem for teachers because how can they effectively teach students if the teachers are not familiar with what they are teaching? Teachers also struggle with time. The Common Core State Standards are very structured and leave little to no time for other activities. In addition, teachers struggle to find time to complete all the modules and lessons within the Common Core. According to McLaughlin and Overturf (2012) “teachers need time for extensive group planning, as well as access to a variety of instructional resources and necessary funding” (p. 161). However, the question remains, how do teachers find the time to plan for implementation and how do teachers find time to study and learn how to teach the Common Core State Standards effectively? From my case study, the goal was to learn as much as I could about both sets of standards in order to help myself and other teachers become the best possible educators we can.

Equity

Equity has been a topic of discussion ever since the Common Core State Standards were adopted. Are the Common Core State Standards truly equal for *all* students? Liebttag says yes as he states that the Common Core State Standards were designed to make education equitable for

all students. “*Equity in education* is the concept that all students have fair access to resources, opportunities, treatment, and success” (Liebtag, 2013, p. 58). Sure, equity in education sounds great. If a child moves from one state to another during the school year, the standards are the same so ideally things would stay fairly consistent. However, what about where students live, their backgrounds, and their school’s budget and/or resources? Can the Common Core State Standards really be considered equal? Kornhaber, Griffith, and Tyler (2014) expand on these questions by saying that peer groups are different within schools and across school districts, infrastructure and equipment differ across schools, and teacher quality (a key influence on student achievement) varies with student demographics (p. 6).

I’m sure all school districts would love to have sufficient funds and resources but this is not reality. “The Common Core State Standards were designed to prepare students with 21st century skills and rely heavily on the use of technology...unfortunately, there are some states that are less prepared for this digital dependency than others” (Liebtag, 2013, p. 60). With this said, there are schools and states who start out at a disadvantage; this is not equity in education. In addition, the Common Core State Standards were created with the intention that students will be *college and career ready*. “While acknowledging that not all students intend to go to college and that careers are important can be viewed as improvements; labeling a student to be destined for one or the other is still oppressive and promotes the idea that there is only one path for each student” (Liebtag, 2013, p. 61). Again, how is this equity in education?

In the research study by Kornhaber, Griffith, and Tyler (2014) they interviewed 11 policy entrepreneurs at the start of the Common Core’s implementation process. The researchers stated that “it allowed us to compare national-level policy entrepreneurs’ perspectives on equity and the Common Core with state-level leaders who strongly support the Common Core and its

implementation” (p. 10). The participants were each asked ten questions to describe how the Common Core might serve diverse students and schools and what educational equity meant to them. The interviews ranged from 55-70 minutes and were conducted by phone, audio recordings, and transcribed verbatim (Kornhaber, Griffith, & Tyler, 2014, p. 11). The following are findings or key points from the study:

- “All the participants voiced a desire for the Common Core to improve education especially for students from educationally challenging circumstances.
- It was expected that the Common Core Standards would increase the education system’s efficiency and make educational resources more widely available.
- Participants recognized that equity would still be challenged by uneven resources; access to these resources would remain unequal across states and districts.
- Participants believed that the Common Core would boost professional development by enabling educators to exchange ideas across districts and states.
- Participants stated that high standards do not ensure high performance across students” (p. 12-17).

There are a lot of key points and ideas that were discovered from this study. Perhaps, the two most important points were that due to a lack of resources, equity could not be achieved, and high standards do not mean high performance. With this said, Common Core cannot close achievement gaps (Liebtag, 2014, p. 20). I think this study is important because a lot can be learned from policy entrepreneurs. In addition, a lot can be learned from this case study; a student’s point of view.

ELA

“One of the key requirements of the Common Core State standards for Reading is that all students must be able to comprehend texts of steadily increasing complexity as they progress through school” (Smith III, Schiano, & Lattanzio, 2014, p. 23). From having experience teaching the Common Core Standards, I have noticed the shift from more fictional texts to informational texts. For my case study, I used informational texts for some of my ELA lessons. Barclay (2013) states that informational text aids in: increasing students’ background knowledge in the content areas and in vocabulary, sparking curiosity and desire to learn about the world, and helping students identify with people different from themselves (p. 16). Informational texts cater to these ideas.

From the previous NYS ELA Standards to the Common Core ELA Standards, there have been shifts in reading and writing. The first shift involves text complexity where students will be able to read and comprehend increasingly complex text throughout grades K-12. The second shift focuses on finding a balance between informational and literary text with a push to read more nonfiction text. The third shift requires students to constantly build vocabulary in order to be able to read complex texts. Being able to write from multiple sources on a single topic using evidence from texts is the fourth critical shift in reading and writing. The fifth shift is centered on text-based answers. Students must engage in rich and rigorous evidence-based conversations and writing about text. Lastly, the sixth shift in reading and writing involves building knowledge in history, social studies, science, and technical subjects (Smith, Schiano, & Lattanzio, 2014, p.22). These shifts in ELA are important in order to challenge our students and push them to achieve their fullest potential. For my case study, I used informational texts for the student to engage in text-based answers and write clear information from each source.

Since the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, there is a decline of Social Studies and Science in the early grade levels. The curriculum mainly focuses on Math and ELA. “Pressured to raise student achievement scores in reading, teachers have succumbed to district and school mandates requiring elimination of content area instruction and of the thematic units of study through which content knowledge in the early grades was typically delivered” (Barclay, 2013, p. 15). However, for my case study, I used an informational text about the Iroquois. The text is from the Common Core State Standards and indicates that the Common Core has not eliminated Social Studies and/or History; just integrating Social Studies into the ELA curriculum.

Lastly, through the Common Core State Standards, “teachers are challenged to deliver instruction that includes effective questioning to advance students’ knowledge of subject matter” (Giouroukakis & Cohan, 2014, p. 13). Many people believe that questioning or asking questions when teaching is very simple. However, questioning can be tricky because as teachers, we are required to ask higher-level thinking questions that will push our students to think critically and outside of the box. Giouroukakis and Cohan (2014) describe three types of questions used in ELA and Social Studies. These types of questions are literal, interpretive, and evaluative. Literal questions are questions that have one right answer. Interpretive questions require high-order thinking skills and require children to read between the lines. Evaluative questions require students to offer their own opinions (p. 15). For my case study, I asked the student many different questions. I tried to stay away from literal questions because in fourth-grade, teachers need to be asking more interpretive and evaluative questions. Interpretive and evaluative questions can be found in the exit tickets that the student will complete after each lesson. I also asked the student questions that I recorded in my observational notes. Questioning is definitely a

technique that I used in my case study and I think it was extremely beneficial for my data collection.

Math

“The question is not “should we have standards,” but instead, “are the Common Core State Standards, as written, appropriate” (Main, 2011, p. 74). Education standards have existed for many years and should guide teachers to provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in the real-world.

Wurman and Wilson (2012) state that “the standard algorithms for adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing whole numbers are the only rich, powerful, beautiful theorems you can teach elementary school kids, and to deny kids these theorems is to leave kids unprepared” (p. 47). Looking at how older generations of people were taught math and how students today are taught math, there is a huge difference in instruction as well as materials. Students today are being taught new methods to solve problems and they use calculators, cell phones, and other forms of technology to solve problems. What is wrong with the basic hand-written algorithms? Sure, it might take longer to solve problems by hand, but it forces students to show their work, problem-solve, and think for themselves.

For example, when I was in school, I was taught the linear algorithms for addition such as carrying the one. Today, students use all different kinds of methods for addition such as the grid method or number bonds. To others, these new methods may seem absurd compared to the more conventional way older generations were taught addition. However, if these newer methods of teaching math are working for our students, we need to proceed with what is best for our students. I have also substitute taught for many high school math teachers and the older students use graphing calculators and tablets to complete their work and solve different math problems.

Again, using technology is engaging for students and more efficient, but what are the students actually learning? For the math lessons I conducted in my case study, I challenged the student to do the work by hand. This forced the student to show case what he knew and what he learned. It also helped me assess what the student mastered and what he needed more instruction with.

Professional development opportunities are one of the most beneficial ways for teachers to continue learning and become the best educators possible. “Cooperation, collaboration, and professional development are needed before we experiment with our children” (Main, 2012, p. 76). Bostic and Matney (2013) conducted a research study in order to address teachers’ needs for professional development in implementing the Common Core Math Standards. Bostic and Matney had three research questions. The first question was “Which of the K-9 content standards did teachers perceive the greatest need for professional development (PD)?” The second research question was “What specific professional content features did teachers perceive they needed the most from PD?” Lastly, the third research question was “How did teachers’ perceived needs align with their previous students’ high-stakes test performance?” (p.13). In the Midwest region, 148 elementary mathematics teachers and 22 grades 6-9 mathematics teachers participated in the study (p.13). Two surveys were used; one for elementary teachers and one for the middle-grade teachers. The surveys asked teachers about their district, grade-levels taught, and years of teaching experience. They also ranked in order their desired professional development foci (p.14) For the K-5 elementary cohort, the two most important areas for content development were Operations & Algebraic Thinking, and Numbers and Operations—Fractions (p.15). I found this interesting because for the Common Core math lessons in my case study, I chose to focus on Numbers and Operations—Fractions. Bostic and Matney found that teachers desired PD that encouraged students’ reasoning and sense making and improved their

facility with instructional strategies that support students' conceptual development of ideas found in the mathematics Common Core State Standards (p. 15). As for the 6-9 middle cohort, teachers desired PD that focused on modeling, statistics and probability, and geometry and measurement. Teachers were most interested in learning ways to help students reason and make sense of mathematics. They were also interest in instructional strategies to promote students' conceptual development of ideas found in the Common Core math standards (p. 16).

Based on Bostic and Matney's research study, there is a clear gap in teacher needs and implementation of the Common Core State Standards of Mathematics. There is definitely a demand for PD and for teachers to learn new teaching strategies to support their instruction. A lot can be learned from Bostic and Matney's research study and I am hoping a lot can be learned from my case study as well.

Motivation and Engagement

As a young new teacher I have struggled with ways to motivate and excite students about reading. From my experience, students either like reading or dislike reading. As a teacher, I want all of my students to learn to love reading and get excited about literacy learning.

In a study conducted by Gambrell (1996), he interviewed elementary students and the students suggested the following four ideas of how to be more interested and excited about reading: let students read more, have lots of books available, let students read to the teacher, and don't interrupt students when reading (p. 14). From my teaching experience, I struggle with having students read independently because it is not beneficial for the students who struggle with reading. I also struggle to motivate students and get students excited about reading. However, after reading Gambrell's research article, I learned five characteristics that will help increase reading motivation in the classroom.

The first characteristic is that the teacher needs to serve as an explicit reading model. This means that the teacher should share his/her own reading experiences and illustrate the value of reading to children (Gambrell, 1996, p. 21). The second characteristic is having a book-rich classroom environment. Gambrell explains that book access is “a significant factor in literacy development” (p. 21). Gambrell goes on to say that high-quality classroom libraries should be a priority in schools (p. 21). However, in my experience, I get too caught up in other teacher priorities and responsibilities that I forget to take time and attend to the classroom library throughout the year. Also, I have seen too many books thrown away from teachers, schools, and public libraries. High-quality classroom libraries won’t exist if people continue to throw books away. The third characteristic that can help create a classroom that fosters reading motivation is opportunities for choice. After conducting interviews with third and fifth grade students, Gambrell found that over 80% of children enjoyed reading the most when they selected the books (p. 21). In addition, other researchers suggest that task engagement increases when students are given opportunities to make choices about their reading” (p.22). The fourth characteristic is opportunities to interact socially with others. Book sharing opportunities include “book clubs, discussion groups, and teacher read-aloud sessions” (p. 22). The final characteristic that could help motivate students to read is having appropriate reading incentives. Teacher praise, bookmarks, and books can be used to effectively increase intrinsic motivation, especially for those who do not have a literacy-rich background (p. 23).

Based on Gambrell’s research, teaching children to read and be excited about reading is not an easy task. However, teachers do have the power to make a difference in the lives of children and their “literacy learning” (Gambrell, 1996, p.23).

Furthermore, Susan Lutz, John Guthrie, and Marcia Davis conducted a research study that assessed student learning engagement during three, fourth-grade reading lessons. Lutz, Guthrie, and Davis (2006) had five research questions that they hoped to answer from their research study. The first research question was “to what extent do the observed classes differ in reading comprehension outcomes?” The second question was “how much do the classes differ in the complexity of reading tasks provided during instruction?” The third research question was “to what extent does student engagement in the reading lessons differ between classes and across time within each lesson?” The fourth question was “to what degree does teacher scaffolding vary with engagement? Lastly, the fifth research question was “to what extent do low and high achievers vary in engagement during one lesson, and how might any variation that they show relate to teacher scaffolding?” (p. 6). Three grade four classrooms located in Frederick County Maryland participated in the study. Class one consisted of 26 students and the teacher was a European American woman with a little over 10 years of teaching experience (p.6). Class two consisted of 31 students and the teacher was a European male with a little over five years of teaching experience (p. 6). Class three consisted of 23 students with a European woman as a teacher who had a little more than 10 years of teaching experience (p. 6). Lastly, four students were selected at random from each classroom as focal students for the engagement analysis: two students were relatively high achievers and two were relatively low achievers (p. 6).

Teachers of classes one and two implemented Concept Oriented Reading Instruction which was reading instruction with science for 90-120 minutes each day (p. 7). The teachers of classes one and two received a guidebook with lesson plans, an array of nonfiction and fiction trade books appropriate for students at different achievement levels, portfolios for each student with worksheets relevant to the strategies they were learning and the science themes they were

exploring, and materials for science experiments related to the science topics they were reading about (p. 7). Class three received traditional reading instruction. Class three used a basal reader for instruction, focused on basic skills rather than comprehension strategies, and did not integrate reading instruction with study of science topics (p.7). Reading comprehension assessments were completed in September and December before and after the 12 week reading intervention was implemented (p.7). In mid-November, the research staff videotaped one lesson in each classroom. The observer ratings of student engagement, literacy task complexity, and teacher scaffolding were based on the videos (p.7).

From the research study, one major finding was that classes one and two, who received integrated reading and science instruction, showed strong growth in reading comprehension and reading strategy (p.13). Lutz, Guthrie, and Davis discovered two things are evident in elementary school classes with high reading comprehension which are at least moderate engagement in learning, and high complexity of literacy tasks in which students are engaged (p. 13). The study also provided “new insights into relations among student engagement, teacher scaffolding, task complexity and reading comprehension” (p. 15). Lastly, it’s important to note that the videotaped observations were highly effective for assessing student engagement. The videotaped observations “facilitated understanding of how teacher scaffolding related to student engagement and provided detailed portraits of interactions between teachers and students” (p. 15).

Based on Lutz, Guthrie, and Davis’s research study, the videotaped observations served as a highly effective assessment tool. When I was student teaching, I videotaped myself teaching to reflect on my effectiveness in the classroom. However, when I watched the video, I found myself analyzing student behavior and engagement. The video helped me assess the engagement

of my students during different lessons and helped me determine how best to alter my own teaching styles to maintain or increase student engagement in my classroom. In all, student motivation and engagement can be challenging but not impossible.

Summary

People have their own opinions as to whether the Common Core State Standards are beneficial or not. Despite what people say, I believe teachers need to be professionals and continue being life-long learners. The Common Core State Standards have proven to be challenging to teachers. I believe that teachers need to accept the challenge, apply what they know and have learned as professionals, and provide students with high-quality, challenging yet appropriate instruction. I also believe that teachers need to attend as many professional development opportunities as possible in order to continue learning and become the best possible educators they can be. As teachers, we want our students to learn, grow, acquire new knowledge, problem-solve, and be ready to use and apply what they have learned throughout their education in order to be successful in the real-world. Standards for education have existed for many years and no matter what changes or new curriculum is adopted, teachers have to maintain professionalism and adjust to the changes in order for students to succeed.

Equity in education is a hard goal to achieve. School districts around the country have different funds and resources. In addition, the Common Core curriculum cannot be achieved by all students. Think about students with disabilities. Students receiving special services and students with other disabilities have varying levels of ability to meet or achieve the high level of performance the Common Core Standards place on students. I think it's a great idea to have a set curriculum that is the same throughout the country but I don't agree that the Common Core is equal for all students.

There has been a lot of discussion about the push for ELA and Math while decreasing the amount of Social Studies and Science students are exposed to. I agree that the Common Core curriculum focuses mainly on ELA and Math; however, the Common Core Standards integrate Social Studies and Science into ELA and Math. For ELA, the Common Core focuses a lot on informational texts and questioning. In my case study, I chose to focus on informational texts and questioning, while also integrating Social Studies. If Social Studies and Science were completely eliminated from the education standards, I would like to think that as a teacher, I would find ways to integrate Social Studies and Science into my instruction. Not only would students become exposed to new information, students would also be pushed to a higher level of thinking; which is essentially the intention of the Common Core State Standards.

Lastly, Math is another topic of discussion I have noticed, especially among parents. First, technology has been a concern for some parents. As a newer teacher, I think technology is great! There are numerous ways to integrate technology into Math instruction (or any area of instruction) that can heighten and add to what students are learning. However, the implementation of technology within a teacher's instruction will only be beneficial if used appropriately. Suggestions I have for teachers are: teachers need to spend time using the technology to ensure it is appropriate for the topic or concept being taught; teachers also need to take the time to learn the technology and teach about the technology before handing it over to the students and expecting the students to be able to use the technology effectively. Therefore, technology can be a great teaching and learning tool only if used appropriately.

In addition to technology, I have had numerous conversations with parents about the way or methods their children are learning math concepts such as addition and subtraction based on the Common Core. Many parents are frustrated because they don't understand the new ways

their children are being taught and therefore, the parents struggle to help their children with their homework or studying. I understand the frustration parents must feel when they can't help their child at home; however, I think it's important to remember the time elapsed when the parents were taught math and how children today are being taught. Lastly, the research study by Bostic and Matney displayed the importance of professional development for teachers to expand their knowledge and learn best how to teach the new math curriculum.

From the research I have collected, there are many different stances and opinions about the Common Core. From my case study, the fourth-grade student also had his own opinions about the Common Core State Standards and the previous NYS Standards, and how both sets of standards could be improved.

Chapter 3

Methods and Procedures

This case study was designed to explore the Math and ELA Common Core State Standards and the previous NYS education standards with intent to learn as much as we could about the standards through lessons conducted with one child. In this chapter, I discuss the participant, setting, procedures, and the data collection methods I used. I also describe how I analyzed my data and addressed the limitations that occurred within my study.

Research Question

I planned my methods and procedures with intent of answering the following research question: What can we learn about the Math and ELA Common Core State Standards and the previous NYS Standards through lessons conducted with one child?

Positionality of the Researcher

I graduated from The College at Brockport, State University of New York with teaching certifications in Early Childhood Education, Childhood Education, and Students with Disabilities. Last year, I completed a long-term teaching assignment in a 12:1:1 Special Education classroom. Currently, I am a long-term Kindergarten teacher in a wonderful school district and I am still in pursuit of a full-time teaching position. I have been attending The College at Brockport, State University of New York working on my master's degree in the Childhood Curriculum Specialist program. I believe that staying current with the curriculum and standards are very important as a professional in education, especially with the change to the new Common Core State Standards. The Common Core curriculum has been adopted by almost all 50 states. The new set of academic standards is intended to prepare students to be college and

career ready. I chose to focus on the Common Core State Standards and previous NYS Standards for my research study to find out as much information as I could.

Participant

I conducted this study with a fourth-grade student who attends the same school I attended when I was in grade school. I purposefully chose this child because I am familiar with the family, and the child is bright and loves to learn!

Setting

The study took place in my home. The child I worked with lives right down the road from my house, making it very convenient for both his parents and me. I conducted the lessons in the basement of my home to have a nice, comfortable area to work in and to eliminate any possible distractions such as visitors or television. There was a large desk for the child to work and also a large floor space that the child used. The child had seen and been in the space before so it was not distracting or overwhelming. I provided all the necessary materials for each lesson so the child just needed to come prepared to learn!

Procedure

This study was conducted over a period of six weeks, during the months of November and December 2014. I met with the child once a week for approximately 2- 2.5 hours where the child completed two lessons; one from the Common Core State Standards and one from the previous NYS Standards. The child was given a break between the two lessons. Ultimately, the time depended on the length of each lesson and the necessary break time the child needed between the two lessons.

At the first meeting, I started by giving the child an overview of the study and answered any questions/concerns the child had. I then asked the child to complete the Beginning Survey

(Appendix A). The information gathered from the survey gave me background information as to what the child liked and disliked about school, what the child currently knew in regards to the Common Core State Standards, what the child liked about Math and ELA, and how the child learned the best. Once the survey was complete, I conducted the first lesson with the child.

The first three meetings focused on Math and the last three meetings focused on ELA. After the child completed the first lesson, he completed the Exit Ticket (Appendix B). The exit ticket was intended to discover what the child liked/disliked about the lesson, what the child learned, and what the child would like to learn more about in regards to the lesson. Once the child completed the exit ticket, we took a break. The length of the break depended on what the child needed. However, I did not exceed 20 minutes because I didn't want the child to lose motivation and focus.

After taking a break, the child completed the second lesson. Once the child finished the second lesson, he completed the exit ticket (Appendix B—same as before). Again, with the exit ticket, the child expressed his opinion as to what he liked/disliked about the lesson, what he learned, and what he wished to learn more about. Then, the child and I conducted a brief review of both lessons. This helped keep the information fresh in the child's mind so the child could complete the End of Lesson exit ticket (Appendix C). The End of Lesson exit ticket was the last and final piece of each meeting. For the exit ticket, the child voiced his opinion as to which lesson he preferred and why. The child also had the opportunity to express what he would change about either (or both) lesson(s) and why. Once the End of lesson exit ticket was completed, the meeting was over. With all this said, minus the Beginning Survey, each meeting with the child followed the procedure listed above.

Data Collection

For my case study, I used four different data collection methods in order to explore and best answer my research question. The data collected used a Beginning (pre) Survey (Appendix A), exit tickets (Appendix B), End of Lesson exit tickets (Appendix C), and observational notes (template, Appendix D). These methods allowed me to gain insight into the child's thinking and learn as much as I could about the Common Core State Standards and the previous NYS Standards.

Beginning Survey

The Beginning Survey (Appendix A) was given to the child at the start of our first meeting. Before conducting any lessons, the child completed this survey. This survey provided me with background information in regards to what the child already knew about the CCSS; what he liked/disliked about Math and ELA; what he liked/disliked about school and learning; and how he learns best.

Getting to know the students is a huge part of being a great teacher. Although I am not the teacher of the child I worked with, I thought it was important to gain some insight about the child, his thoughts about school, and what he knew about the Common Core State Standards. The data I collected from this survey was also used to alter some of the lessons I created in order to best fit the child's interests and his needs.

Exit Ticket

The child completed an exit ticket (Appendix B) after each and every lesson I conducted with him. The purpose of the exit ticket was to have the child express his thoughts about each lesson. The child wrote what he liked and disliked about the lesson, if the lesson was engaging (if not, what could be done), what he learned from the lesson, and what he would like to know

more about in regards to the lesson. In essence, the data I collected from the exit tickets allowed me to learn more about the child's thinking, what the child has learned/grasped from each lesson, and what the child needed to learn more about.

End of Lesson Ticket

The End of Lesson exit ticket (Appendix C) was completed by the child at the end of each meeting. At this time, the child had completed one Common Core lesson and the exit ticket, one previous NYS Standards lesson and the exit ticket, and lastly, he completed the End of Lesson ticket. Before completing this ticket, the child and I discussed each lesson. The discussion recapped and summarized each lesson and was a great time for me to write down observational notes.

The End of Lesson ticket was a way to wrap-up our session and gave the child a chance to digest all the information and express his thoughts. With the End of Lesson ticket, the child determined which lesson, Common Core or previous NYS Standard, he preferred and why. The child also had the opportunity to write what he would change about either (or both) of the lessons and why.

Observation Notes

During each meeting/session with the child, I took notes (template, Appendix D). I took notes during each lesson I conducted with the child, during any conversations or discussions we had, and while the child was filling out the exit tickets and end of lesson tickets.

Limitations

Within my case study, there were two potential limitations which were time and fatigue. When I created my lessons, I had determined that each lesson could take anywhere from 25 to 45 minutes. For each session that I met with the child, he completed two lessons. Time and fatigue

were definitely a risk; however, the child was given a break between the two lessons each time we met. The break was intended to give the child a period of rest to reduce (or eliminate) the risk of fatigue.

In addition to the limitations, I discovered three difficulties after analyzing the data. As a result of the child's busy schedule, the child and I were only able to meet once a week. A week is a long period of time where the child could have forgotten information from the previous meeting or could have lost interest in participating in the study. Another difficulty I found was time. It would have been nice to have more time to work with the child in order to gain more information and insight about the different standards and lessons from the child's point of view. However, due to the student's busy schedule and my fear of the child becoming fatigued, there was only time to complete two lessons once a week. Lastly, some of the student's written responses were vague and I wish the student would have added more details to explain his thoughts. However, I didn't want to push the student to add more to his responses because I didn't want the student to reach a level of frustration or become disengaged from the study. If I was to conduct this study again or a similar study, I would address these difficulties and try to find potential solutions to the problems in order to improve the study and the outcomes of the study.

Chapter 4

The purpose of my case study was to learn as much information as I could about the Common Core State Standards and the previous NYS Standards through lessons conducted with a fourth-grade student. Math and ELA seem to be the focus of the education standards which is why I chose to center my case study on Math and ELA lessons from the Common Core and the previous NYS Standards.

Results and Findings

First, I found that neither the Common Core nor the previous NYS Standards provide the level of challenge the fourth-grade student (working at or above grade level) needs. Second, I discovered that there is a need for both sets of standards to allow more time for creativity and hands-on learning opportunities. Third, referring to the lessons I created, the fourth-grade student preferred the previous NYS math lessons versus the Common Core math lessons. The final finding in regards to my case study is that the student preferred the Common Core ELA lessons versus the previous NYS ELA lessons I created.

Seeks Challenge

Before conducting any lessons, the student completed the Beginning Survey to provide me with some background information about him and what he knows regarding Common Core. One of the survey questions asked the student what he dislikes about school and the student wrote “things are too easy but I stick to the curriculum and sometimes get bored.” The student's response was interesting and very clear. The student's response indicates that he is not being challenged enough in school if things are too easy which ultimately leads to the child's boredom in school. The student's response also suggests that he realizes teachers are following the curriculum and teaching what needs to be taught. However, the curriculum and content being

taught is not being altered to provide more of a challenge for the student and fit the child's needs.

From this case study, I learned that the child loved the idea of integrating games into different lessons because the idea of a game and competition made the lesson exciting and more of a challenge. After completing the recipe math lesson where the student had to double a recipe by adding the fractions for each ingredient, when asked if he thought the lesson was fun and engaging, the student wrote “yes, it made it challenging by competing against my teacher.” Competing against the teacher motivated the student which made it less likely for the child to become bored with the task. In addition, when learning about the Grid Method for solving addition and subtraction problems, I completed the worksheet along with the student in order to make the worksheet a little more challenging for the student. The idea behind the worksheet was for the child to show what he learned. Knowing that the child liked to be challenged, I decided to compete against him and complete the worksheet. The idea of competing against his teacher pushed the student to focus more on his work and check his work over because the student wanted to beat the teacher and get all of the questions correct. Lastly, in regards to games, the student loved the Fraction Board Game lesson. Again, the student liked the challenge of playing against his teacher because he desperately wanted to beat me. When completing the exit ticket and answering what the student would like to learn more about, the student wrote “adding harder questions and more questions.” The student's response provided evidence that the child is in desperate need for a challenge! I'm not indicating that the child was bored, in fact, the child was very engaged throughout the entire board game; however, based on the child's response, the child wanted more questions and harder questions in order to be pushed to a higher level of learning.

Creativity and Hands-On Activities

Another finding I discovered from my case study is that neither the Common Core State Standards nor the previous NYS Standards provide enough opportunities for students to engage in hands-on activities and express their knowledge and learning through creativity.

From the Beginning Survey, the student wrote that he liked Art class in school because he likes being creative. Art is a class where students can express who they are, get messy, and have fun while engaging in multiple hands-on tasks. The student also indicated that he learns best through one-on-one and hands-on instruction. The student's response suggests that he knows how he learns best. The student's teacher should be catering to the child's needs to keep the student engaged and eliminate the possibility of boredom.

During the first previous NYS Standards math lessons, the student was extremely engaged when he created his own recipe. I expected the student to create a simple recipe with ingredients such as sugar and flour. However, the child developed his very own creation called Monster Malt. The ingredients were as follows:

- 1 cup Zombie Eyes
- 2 4/5 tsp. Costume Candy
- 5 5/6 cup Witches Brew
- 5 tsp. Ghostly Chains
- 7 11/13 cup Jack-O-Lantern Juice
- 4 lbs. Goblin Breath
- 2 2/5 lbs. Black Cats Tail
- 1 1/5 lbs. Magic Broomstick

The student's recipe was interesting and very creative. After the student had finished creating his recipe, the student and I competed against each other to double the recipe. The student liked the challenge of competing against his teacher while adding fraction problems that he created! The student loves Halloween and his recipe creation provides evidence that when given an opportunity to be creative, children will take full advantage and can really show case who they are!

When learning about the Grid Method, the student expressed that he thought the Grid Method was "awesome and sort of like a game." On the exit ticket, the student wrote that he didn't like the lesson because it wasn't hands-on. The student also wrote that he thought the lesson was engaging because he got to compete against me. The student definitely seeks hands-on opportunities even if a lesson is engaging. In the actual lesson plan I created, I didn't intend on competing against the student. However, I chose to compete against the child in hopes to keep the student focused, engaged, and interested in the lesson. This is a clear example of a teacher having to alter a lesson to keep a student engaged and on task. Clearly the lesson from the standards was not engaging for the student because it didn't involve hands-on activities or opportunities to be creative. Therefore, I had to change the lesson and compete against the student in hopes to keep the student engaged and focused on the task at hand.

During the second previous NYS math lesson, the student had to complete a few different worksheets. When completing the worksheets, the student put a box around each answer and wrote "answer here" with an arrow pointing to each box. This idea provides evidence that the student was finding his own way of utilizing his creativity. While the student spent time placing boxes around his answers with arrows, he was wasting valuable learning time. It's evident that the task was boring for the student and he was desperately searching for ways to express his

creativity. From this example, I can conclude that a student who craves creativity and hands-on activities will do anything to obtain it; even if it means drawing and using valuable learning time unwisely.

Using manipulatives and/or technology seems to increase student engagement. During the first Common Core math lesson, the student really enjoyed using a whiteboard to complete his work. Although a whiteboard may seem like a simple object, it served as a hands-on learning tool that ultimately increased student engagement. In addition, when participating in the third Common Core ELA lesson, the student used my laptop to create a short PowerPoint presentation. The student was extremely excited to use the computer and type his response rather than writing everything down. Anytime teachers can integrate manipulatives or technology into lessons, they should! For the lesson plan I created, it did not incorporate a whiteboard. However, I decided to let the student use the whiteboard because I didn't want the child to become bored and disengaged. Hands-on manipulatives and technology can really enrich lessons and activities as long as they are used appropriately.

Another example of there being a need for more hands-on and opportunities for creativity happened during the first Common Core math lesson. When the student was ready to start the problem-set, the student saw the words 'problem-set' and said that he knew it would be a boring worksheet just like he is used to doing in school. Right off the bat it was evident that the child was disengaged because he knew the content would be tedious and boring. I can only assume that in school, the content must be too easy or the class follows the same routine over and over because the student started complaining about the task before even knowing what the task was! Clearly, the problem-set lacks hands-on activities and ways to be creative; things the student yearns for.

After completing the first ELA lesson from the previous NYS Standards, the student wrote that most of the lesson was engaging but he wished there were fewer questions. The student liked reading the story but didn't want to answer the questions. The student believes that reading should be fun; not about answering questions. After reading the story, the child was able to retell the story using specific details and his own expressive language. As I reflected upon the lesson, it wasn't necessary for the child to complete the questions because he had already shown me through his retelling that he understood the story. Not integrating a hands-on activity or opportunity for the child to express his creativity was disengaging for the student, and having him answer the comprehension questions pushed him further from being engaged.

Getting to know your students and their interests is very important in order to create lessons that are exciting for students. When I created the second ELA lesson from the previous NYS Standards, I chose the book about volcanoes because I knew the student liked Science and volcanoes. The student was extremely excited about the volcano book and that he was able to keep the book! Reading is not something all students like to do. However, when finding reading material on topics that are of interest to students, it increases the possibility that they will be engaged and excited about reading and learning (Gambrell, 1996). Gambrell also states that "most children enjoy reading and are interested in books when they are given the opportunity to select their own reading material" (p.21). In addition, it's important for students to connect with the reading and be able to make real-life connections. When learning about the roles of Iroquois men, women, boys, and girls, the student was engaged with what life was like for the Iroquois and how different it was from his own life. When asked if he could live as an Iroquois boy, the student responded by saying he would be scared because he would have to do all the work the Iroquois boys did and he would rather "be lazy, play games with friends, and go to school."

The last thing I want to mention is the need for students to be creative. On the exit ticket of the last Common Core math lesson, the student wrote that he didn't think the lesson was fun because he wasn't up and moving. As a suggestion of how to make the lesson better, the student suggested integrating the game Twister. The student created his own version of Twister involving fractions and how the game could be played. Not only was the child seeking movement, the child also displayed his desire for creativity by developing his own game that incorporated the content being taught. In addition to creating his own game, the student was given the opportunity of creating his own Wampum bracelet. The student was extremely excited about designing his own bracelet and physically putting the bracelet together.

From my teaching experience, I have worked with many students, not just the student I worked with for this case study, who seek hands-on and interactive activities in order to maintain interest and engagement. Although it no longer impacts the previous NYS Standards, I believe both sets of standards should integrate more hands-on activities and opportunities for students to express their creativity. I also believe that teachers should find more ways to integrate small group work and provide individual attention. The study conducted by Lutz, Guthrie, and Davis (2006) supports this statement as they reported that when teachers direct small group or individual attention toward students, students are more likely to be engaged. In contrast, if teachers do not show attention towards students in small groups or individual attention, students will display low engagement (p. 12).

Previous NYS Math Lessons: Preferred

Once I completed my case study and looked over the data, I found that the student preferred the math lessons from the previous NYS Standards over the math lessons from

Common Core. It's important to note that the student was responding to the math lessons I created based on the standard I chose to focus on.

After completing the first math lesson of the previous NYS Standards and the Common Core, the student wrote, "I liked the old way (previous NYS Standards lesson) better because I like to get creative and I liked the challenge when I got to do my own recipe." The student also wrote that he would change the Common Core lesson so it had more hands-on activities because he likes to do hands-on activities. It's clear that the child yearns for opportunities to express his creativity and engage in hands-on learning tasks. The lessons that incorporate these activities will be the lessons the child enjoys.

The second set of math lessons consisted of solving fraction addition and subtraction problems by finding the common denominator (previous NYS Standards), and adding and subtracting more than two fractions (Common Core State Standards). When completing the End of Lesson Exit Ticket, the student wrote that he liked the old lesson better because he got to do the box (grid) method. The student also wrote that he would change the Common Core lesson by integrating more hands-on activities. Again, the student preferred the previous NYS math lesson and feels the Common Core should integrate more hands-on learning opportunities.

For the third and final set of math lessons, the student indicated that he liked the old lesson better because he got to play a board game. When asked what he would change about either of the two lessons, the student wrote he would change the Common Core lesson by including a Twister game. The student even created and wrote the directions for his new Twister game. The student's response about the Common Core lesson displays his need for creativity and indicates that the child believes a game should be integrated into Common Core math lessons.

As I reviewed the math lessons, I came to the conclusion that the student selected the previous NYS Standards lessons because the lessons allowed the student to be creative, involved hands-on or interactive opportunities, and had fewer worksheets. The Common Core math lessons do not always integrate hands-on opportunities and consist of many worksheets. If teachers are following the Common Core math lessons as written, as I did for my case study, I can predict that students will become bored with the same monotonous procedure day after day: fluency, application problem, concept development, problem-set, exit ticket, and homework. In order for students to learn and have fun doing so, students need a challenge, hands-on learning tasks, and opportunities to move around and be creative.

Common Core ELA Lessons: Preferred

Although the student preferred the previous NYS Standard math lessons, the student preferred the Common Core ELA lessons versus the previous NYS Standard ELA lessons. It's important to note that the student's preference wasn't referring to Common Core; rather, the student was referring to the ELA module lessons I chose to use from the Common Core in my case study.

After completing the first ELA lesson from the previous NYS Standards and the first ELA lesson from Common Core, the student expressed that he preferred the Common Core lesson because he liked moving around the room to the different pictures of the gallery walk. The student also stated that he would change the previous NYS Standard lesson by having better stories. The child's response suggests that the story "Foggy Figure" was not of interest to him and/or may have been too easy. In contrast, for the Common Core lesson, the student not only loved moving around during the gallery walk, the student also enjoyed learning about Native Americans. The Common Core lesson presented an opportunity for the child to move around

and also was interesting to the child. It's important for teachers to get to know their students and incorporate their interests into lessons or activities because it will help engage students, keep them focused, and have fun while learning.

During the second set of ELA lessons, the student read about the eruption of Vesuvius for the previous NYS Standards lesson, and read about the roles of Iroquois men, women, boys, and girls for the Common Core lesson. The student favored the Common Core lesson because he learned about the Iroquois. The student wrote, "I would make the old way (previous NYS) and Common Core way better by making more interactive stuff." When I reviewed the two lessons, I discovered that the student loved learning about volcanoes but he loved learning about the Iroquois more; however, the student still craved hands-on and interactive activities.

For the last and final set of ELA lessons, the student expressed that he liked the Common Core lesson the best because he made the Wampum bracelet. The student also stated that he would change the old lesson by adding a hands-on activity. Making the Wampum bracelet was a perfect activity for the student because he had the challenge of designing his own bracelet using the special grid paper, he utilized his creativity when designing his bracelet, and putting the beads on the pipe cleaners according to the student's design was a great hands-on activity.

Summary

Although we no longer use the previous NYS Standards, I believe that if both sets of standards, Previous NYS Standards and Common Core State Standards, were able to integrate challenge, creativity, and hands-on opportunities into all lessons and/or activities, it would enhance student leaning and help make learning fun and exciting for students.

In all, whether teachers like or dislike the Common Core curriculum, they are mandated to teach it. Like I've mentioned before, the Common Core is not perfect. Teachers need to put

their knowledge, skills, and experience to use in order to alter the curriculum and meet the various needs of their students. Teachers also need to take advantage of professional development opportunities in order to expand their knowledge and apply what they learn to their teaching in order to best educate their students. Standards are just the guidelines that teachers need to follow. *How* teachers teach the information and help their students learn is what matters most.

Chapter 5

The purpose of this research study was to learn as much as we could about the ELA and Math previous NYS Standards and Common Core State Standards through lessons conducted with one child. From this study, I was able to obtain information about both set of standards from a child's point of view. After conducting six ELA and six Math lessons I have found pros and cons concerning the previous NYS Standards and the Common Core State Standards. The intent of this study was not to determine which set of standards is better because the previous NYS Standards are no longer being used. New York State has adopted the Common Core State Standards and the CCSS are the standards that teachers are mandated to teach. Rather, the intent of this study was to work one-on-one with a child, find out the opinions the child has about both set of standards, and suggest ideas to improve the Common Core State Standards.

Conclusions

Before conducting this study, I tried to be as open-minded as I could but I had my own opinion as to what I thought the student would say and which lessons the student would prefer. However, the data I collected did not match my original opinions and this study really opened my eyes as to the pros and cons of both sets of standards. After analyzing the data and research conducted, I have determined two conclusions as a result of this case study. The first conclusion is that no matter what the education standards may be, the standards will always be the guidelines that teachers are mandated to teach. The second conclusion is that if given the opportunity, students can offer valuable feedback for teachers. This study also allowed me to gain information about the standards from a child's point of view and turn the student's opinions into possible suggestions as to how to improve the Common Core State Standards and suggestions for teachers to improve their instruction.

Standards are Guidelines

After reading through all the research I collected and after analyzing the data I collected from my case study, it's important to realize that no matter what the education standards may be, education standards will always be the guidelines that educators rely on in order to determine what they are required to teach.

NYS adopted the Common Core State Standards. The Common Core is now the standards and curriculum that NYS educators are required to teach. However, did NYS teachers have to sign a document agreeing to teach the Common Core in the order it is written or in the exact rigorous structure it is written in? No! The Common Core curriculum is very structured, rigorous, and doesn't leave a lot of time for anything else. However, after teaching the Common Core curriculum for almost two years, I have learned the objectives and the learning targets are the most important part of Common Core. Teachers can take the objectives and learning targets from any lesson and create their own lessons and activities as long as they are aligned with the objectives and learning targets from Common Core. This will grant teachers more freedom as to what activities they integrate into their lessons.

My goal of this case study was not to determine or voice my opinion as to whether I agree with Common Core. My goal was to learn as much as I could about Common Core. From conducting this case study and from my own experience teaching Common Core, one thing I have learned is that no matter what you do as an educator, there is no way teachers can teach the entire Common Core curriculum in one full academic year. With this said, I believe that teachers need to be professionals, and eliminate parts of the curriculum that are not necessary based on their students' needs.

Students Give Valuable Feedback for Teachers

After working with the fourth-grade student and after analyzing the conversations we had and the exit tickets the student completed, I learned that the student had real valuable comments and recommendations for me as the instructor and for the lessons conducted. Not only was the child given the opportunity to express what he liked and disliked about each lesson, he was also able to voice his opinion and offer suggestions that would make the lesson/activity better. If I had more time to work with the child, I would have used his feedback to create new lessons/activities that catered to his needs.

Students know how they learn best and I think it's important for teachers to give students opportunities to provide their feedback of different lessons/activities they participate in. For example, students could complete an exit ticket in the middle of a unit and express what they have learned, what they do not yet understand, and what they would like to learn more about. This would provide the teacher with valuable information as to how best to proceed with the unit and what the teacher may have to go back and reteach. The teacher could also give the students another exit ticket with the same questions at the end of the unit. From there, the teacher will know what the students still need help with and can address the information accordingly.

Teacher feedback from students is crucial in order to know what the students are actually learning and what the students still need help with. The most important part of student feedback is what the teacher does with the feedback. If the teacher doesn't use the valuable feedback from the students as a teaching tool, then the teacher shouldn't ask for feedback in the first place. Feedback from students can be a powerful tool for teachers but only if used appropriately.

Recommendations for Educators

My first suggestion to improve the implementation of Common Core is for teachers to take advantage of professional development opportunities in order to learn different strategies and techniques to effectively teach the Common Core curriculum. Bostic and Matney (2013) conducted a study on the need for professional development instruction for teachers who were struggling to understand and effectively teach the Common Core math standards. There are a ton of different professional development opportunities readily available to teachers. I currently work as a long-term substitute and receive multiple emails each month of different professional development classes. In addition, during Superintendent days, teachers in my school district can sign up for professional development classes where we can continue learning how best to effectively cater to the needs of our students while implementing the Common Core instruction.

Next, teachers need to integrate more hands-on activities in order to engage students and make learning fun and exciting. When I read the report by Conley (2014) I noticed a box where Conley had listed sample verbs of the Common Core. Some of the words included: “analyze, compare, hypothesize, preclude, recall, specify, and validate” (pg. 10). Out of the 35 words listed, the words engage, create, or interact were not present. Many students, including the child I worked with in my case study, learn best through creativity and hands-on activities. However, the Common Core fails to incorporate such ideas because the policy makers are focused solely on getting students to reach the standards while conducting multiple assessments. Learning should be fun and exciting for students. This is why I believe that the creators of Common Core (and the previous NYS Standards) and teachers should find ways to integrate activities that involve creativity and hands-on learning.

Lastly, teachers need to take the time to get to know their students and their students' interests. Once a teacher develops an understanding of his/her student's interests, the teacher can start to integrate the student's interests into his/her instruction to further engage the students and push the students to a higher level of learning. Again, these ideas are just suggestions but I feel they are important to best implement the Common Core curriculum.

Recommendations for Future Research

After researching information, conducting this case study, and analyzing the data collected, I believe I have learned a great deal of information about the previous NYS Standards and the Common Core State Standards. However, further research could be conducted, similar to this case study, but rather than conducting lessons with just one child of one grade level, a study could be conducted with multiple students of various grade levels. In addition, numerous different ELA and Math lessons could be created of multiple topics. As a result of a new, wider study, a vast amount of information could be learned about the previous NYS Standards and CCSS.

Another possible study that could lead to more information about the Common Core would be to collect and analyze teachers' opinions about the Common Core curriculum. Teachers from rural, suburban, and urban school districts could be surveyed or interviewed and researchers could analyze how the teachers' opinions/views of the Common Core are similar and/or different. The Common Core is what teachers are mandated to teach and this possible study could offer suggestions of how to adjust the Common Core and make it more effective for both teachers and students.

Other recommendations for future research could be to find strategies/methods that will help teachers learn and improve how they teach the Common Core curriculum. Also, to research

different hands-on activities and ultimately, create a list of hands-on activities that teachers could use for every lesson of the Common Core, both ELA and Math. These ideas I mention would not be easy but would increase and add to the information learned from my case study.

Summary

The Common Core State Standards may be rigorous, may not leave time for crafts or creativity, and may not incorporate numerous hands-on activities. However, the Common Core is the curriculum being taught and should be done so with enthusiasm, not matter how a teacher may feel about the CCSS. From my research and my case study, it's evident that neither the previous NYS Standards nor the CCSS are perfect. Teachers need to be invested in teaching and be willing to take the time to learn the best strategies and methods for teaching the Common Core. As time progresses, hopefully teachers will become more and more comfortable with the Common Core and confident in their ability to effectively teach the Common Core.

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Appendix A
Beginning Survey

Name: _____

Date: _____

Beginning Survey

❖ What do you know about Common Core?

❖ What do you like about Math?

❖ What do you dislike about Math?

❖ What do you like about ELA/Reading?

❖ What do you dislike about ELA/Reading?

❖ What do you like best about school and learning?

❖ What do you dislike about school and learning?

❖ How do you learn the best?

Appendix B

Exit Ticket

Name: _____

Date: _____

Exit Ticket

❖ What did you like about the lesson and why?

❖ What didn't you like about the lesson and why?

❖ Was the lesson fun and engaging? If not, what could have been done?

❖ What did you learn from this lesson?

❖ What would you like to learn more about in regards to this lesson?

Appendix D

Observation Notes Template

Observation Notes:

| |
|---|
| Date: |
| Lesson Title: |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• |