

**LOCAL TEACHERS' AND PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE COMMON CORE
LEARNING STANDARDS**

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore and understand how the Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) affect teachers' perceptions toward their career and parents' perceptions toward their child's education. This study sought to answer the following research questions: What are parents' perceptions of the impact of the CCLS on their child's learning? What are the teachers' perceptions of the CCLS on their teaching? Data sources included six interviews of parents with a child in Kindergarten through seventh grade and five interviews of general education teachers of Kindergarten through fifth grade classrooms. This study concluded the Common Core Learning Standards are perceived in a generally negative manner by parents and teachers.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	3
The Effects of the CCLS on Teachers.....	4
The Effects of the CCLS on Students Who Face Various Challenges.....	10
The Effects of the CCLS on Families.....	12
Deficiencies in the Literature.....	14
Methodology.....	14
Phenomenological Research Design.....	14
Researcher’s Role.....	15
Participants and Research Site.....	15
Data Collection.....	16
Data Analysis.....	17
Results.....	18
Discussion and Conclusion.....	38
Overview of Study and Findings.....	38
Significance of Findings.....	39
Limitations of the Study.....	39
Conclusions.....	40
Future Research.....	40
References.....	42
Appendix A-Teacher Interview Questions.....	45
Appendix B-Parent Interview Questions.....	47

Local Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions of the Common Core Learning Standards

Introduction

The Common Core Learning Standards (CCLS) have been adopted by school districts in the United States over the last few years, but many families and teachers are still questioning their purpose and effectiveness. According to Exstrom and Thatcher (2014), the Common Core initiative began in November 2007, state adoption started in March 2009, and the final draft of the standards was completed in April 2011. There are still questions that revolve around who developed them, how they were funded, and what the deciding factor was for states to participate (Exstrom & Thatcher, 2014).

Murphy (2014) argued the standards emerged because it was nearly impossible to tell how students were performing compared to other schools, other states, and other countries. The American Federation of Teachers called the standards the stepping stone to a better education system; however, many were skeptical because it is upheld by the federal government (Murphy, 2014). Many states were incentivized to adopt the CCLS with the opportunity to receive funding from Race to the Top, a fund from the federal government that promotes educational reform to improve teaching.

In December 2011, forty-five states adopted the standards and began to implement them in their schools (Exstrom & Thatcher, 2014). These standards hold children accountable for information that will supposedly prepare them for college and careers by the end of high school (Heskial & Wamba, 2013). However, this reform happened so rapidly that five of those states (Oklahoma, Indiana, Missouri, North Carolina, and South Carolina) voted to revoke the CCLS and utilize their previous standards until they could develop and apply new state standards.

Lawmakers in each of those states opted to take time to investigate the standards potential and make alterations to improve them or create new ones (Exstrom & Thatcher, 2014).

The CCLS raised many questions and induced mixed feelings about their purpose and intent. In this social context, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the teachers' perceptions of the CCLS on their teaching?
 - a) How are these new standards affecting the way teachers teach in the classroom?
 - b) Are teachers adequately prepared to implement the CCLS?
 - c) Do they have the necessary tools to plan effective instruction that reflects the CCLS?
- 2) What are parents' perceptions of the impact of the CCLS on their child's learning?
 - a) How are parents adjusting to this change?
 - b) What challenges do families encounter with the CCLS?
 - c) How do the CCLS affect their child's attitude toward school?

The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to explore and understand how the CCLS affected teachers' perceptions toward their career and parents' perceptions toward their child's education. Participants were six parents and five teachers of students in rural Western New York public elementary schools. In this study, interviews were used to discover the personal experiences that shaped the views the participants had toward the CCLS. These revelations were examined to determine what kind of action should be taken to raise awareness of the effects of the CCLS. For the purpose of this research, the CCLS were defined as research and evidence based learning goals that help prepare students for college and careers. The Common Core State Standards Initiative (2015) described the standards as clear, understandable, and consistent expectations built upon the strengths and lessons of current state standards.

Literature Review

The CCLS is an initiative developed to help schools across the United States achieve the same academic goals. Upon high school graduation, a student in California will be expected to know the same information a student of the same age in New York knows. On a larger scale, the CCLS were designed to help the U.S. become internationally competitive. The CCLS aim to have all children on the same level in terms of their knowledge and skills, but the reform failed to address the social and emotional issues children face outside of school such as poverty, health problems, and attitudes. It was proven that children affected by poverty are likely to have slow language development and face challenges with social and emotional behaviors. The Common Core and the standardized testing associated with the CCLS do not control for poverty or other insecurities children may endure (Krashen, 2014). Many questions have been asked with concern for the effectiveness of the standards.

This literature review includes various perspectives of how the CCLS have impacted the lives of teachers and families. It is organized to explain how teachers have adapted to the standards in regards to professional development and curriculum planning and whether they are prepared enough to teach according to this new reform. It identifies the struggles of teaching students with disabilities according to the mandates of the standards and identifies issues families face such as stress and anxiety due to the more rigorous expectations. The literature examines the perceptions of both teachers and families and identifies the changes and challenges caused by the CCLS.

The Effects of the CCLS on Teachers

The CCLS have affected teachers in many ways. They have had to do immense preparations for its implementation, alter instruction in many ways, and school staff members have had to fulfill many different roles.

Preparation for the Common Core. Planning ahead has been a part of the teaching profession for decades. Proper preparation can turn a seemingly difficult lesson into a perfectly executed, positive experience for both teachers and students. On the contrary, when preparation is null, it can discourage the greatest professionals. Since the use of the Common Core is still a fairly new phenomenon, preparation is more important than ever.

Professional development is the key to preparing teachers to encourage success in the classroom. Continuous learning can be personally rewarding, as well as contagious (Lommen, 2014). Gewertz (2014a) revealed 71% of surveyed teachers attended professional development regarding the implementation of the CCLS in 2013. In 2014, that percentage rose to 87%. However, teachers still feel inadequately trained to administer Common Core aligned assessments (Gewertz, 2014a). When teachers felt inadequately about their abilities to teach, it reflects negatively in their presentation of the curriculum to students. In turn, this can cause negative attitudes in student learning (de Vries, van de Grift, & Jansen, 2014). In relation to connecting the CCLS with the curriculum, teachers need to become fluent in the new standards and proficient in scaffolding the skills necessary for their students' success (Jacobs-Israel, 2012). Robertson (2013) explained teachers needed time to break-down the standards in order to develop instruction that was appropriate to their students. Most teachers have received training, but were not clear on how to connect the standards with assessment (Gewertz, 2014a).

Gutierrez (2014) conducted a qualitative study in which she analyzed four viewpoints needed to understand the CCLS: structural, human resources, political, and symbolic. She guided her analysis from the work of Bolman and Deal through a multi-perspective organizational theory lens. In the discussion of the viewpoints, she concluded the standards are simply goals students must achieve, but in order to achieve the whole purpose of the CCLS, it is going to take the collaboration of districts, teachers, parents, communities, and politicians to implement that.

In order to support the standards, the structural viewpoint examined how all of the educational professionals involved in the integration of the Common Core need to be organized and prepared. In order to implement the CCLS and maintain the integrity of the standards, structure should be designed appropriately according to the organizations goals, available resources and technology, people, the environment, and strategies (Gutierrez, 2014). There is no “one size fits all” approach to accommodate the CCLS. Many factors such as academic and developmental levels must be taken into consideration upon implementation.

The human resources view of the standards defined people as individuals and people as organizations, as the driving force of student learning and student success. It encouraged collaboration between parents, teachers, and students. Professional development and reflection hold importance in providing the best possible learning experience for everyone. The continuous efforts from the human resources are the key to the survival of the CCLS and its purpose (Gutierrez, 2014).

The political view simply explained that “change is hard,” and affects everyone differently. It causes many mixed emotions from all those involved. People and organizations hold different “values, beliefs, perceptions of reality, interests, and information” (Gutierrez, 2014, p. 77). The politics of education range from the national level all the way down the

community level-everyone having a different perspective on the CCLS. Gutierrez (2014) described the main conflict as the diverse opinions of the purpose and effects the standards had, how decisions were being made regarding the design and implementation of them, and who was making them.

People use symbols to help ensue clarity. The symbolic view of the standards analyzed how people make sense of the Common Core. More broadly, “how humans make sense of the chaotic ambiguous world in which they live” (Gutierrez, 2014).

Gutierrez (2014) explained the controversy of politics involvement with the standards and the difficulty families face when change presents itself. The study concluded that it was crucial to identify the problems, issues, goals, successes, and effects from each viewpoint, and understand them in order to make the best decisions possible for the students. In order to do that, resources need to be readily available to continue to be prepared with the most current and effective CCLS methods and information. In other words, professional development is monumental in making connections between all of the elements that compose the CCLS to develop a true understanding of its purpose.

The Gallup-Education Week Superintendent's Panel survey revealed less than 50 percent of superintendents felt their districts' teachers are prepared to take on the CCLS (Maxwell, 2014). The CCLS are more rigorous and are aimed at reflecting teacher effectiveness, which is causing a lot of strain on educators (Wiener, 2013). According to the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), support for the standards has dropped dramatically within the last year, and teachers expressed their concerns for adequate preparation at a recent convention in Los Angeles. Two-thirds of the AFT delegates voted for the standards to be more of a guide than to be used in a strict manner (Weingarten, Hiller, & Cody, 2014). The idea was to move away from the

standardized testing associated with the standards and their reflection of teacher efficacy. The delegates called for school officials to be in control of proper implementation, as well as parent and teacher involvement in the process and progress (Weingarten et al., 2014).

One school district took action to provide an easily accessible form of professional development that allowed teachers to openly communicate and effectively investigate the standards. Robertson (2013) talked about the effects of a cloud-based system used in his district in California to ensure preparation. This type of environment allowed teachers of the same level to gather and break apart the standards to see exactly what the students needed to accomplish using Google Apps for Education (GAFE). GAFE “increased collaboration and communication about the CCLS and its implementation” (Robertson, 2013, p. 60).

Curriculum and Instruction. In most cases, educators have a strong inclination of what is right for their students based upon their research, education, and intuition. The CCLS have the potential to support that. However, teachers have been forced to make curriculum decisions that may not be in a student’s best interest due to state mandates. This can cause an emotional upset in the classroom and at home. For example, if a teacher is required by state to administer a test, but the test is beyond the student’s ability level, it could cause the student to become distressed. This could lead to a potential outburst in the classroom, health problems, or a disinterest in academics. Students have a tendency to refuse to do work if the logic and reasoning behind it is not explained (Brunner, 2013).

The CCLS were formulated to be clearly defined expectations for each grade level (Wolf, Wang, Blood, & Huang, 2014). They raised expectations with high order thinking, complex texts, and increased focus (Neuman & Roskos, 2013). While they have the potential to be a positive educational reform, the developmentally appropriateness of the standards is questioned

when the students are asked questions above their ability. They are subdued to guesswork, which eliminates comprehension. The president of the Chicago Teachers Union argued the CCLS take away the potential creativeness students have and restricts their need to work with others (Weingarten et al., 2014). Troia and Olinghouse (2013) stressed the importance of evidence-based practices (EBP) and foundational skills in relation to effectively implementing the CCLS. EBP's are methods used in the classroom that are supported by research. The CCLS have modules that dictate how to teach to the standards causing developmentally appropriate evidence-based practices to decrease in the classroom.

While many teachers may show positive support for the CCLS, there is a lack of materials that align with the Common Core. Without the proper materials to teach the new CCLS-aligned curriculum, many students may not be learning with the foundational understanding the standards are designed to provide. About six in ten teachers argued their classroom materials do not align with the Common Core expectations (Gewertz, 2014a). The implementation has caused a large disrupt in the realm of education and has cost districts and states a significant amount of money to provide new materials, training, and technology. And there is no guarantee that the CCLS will remain in effect for a long period of time. According to McShane (2014), Maryland stated it would cost more than \$100 million to obtain the necessary technology to fully implement the CCLS. It would be a lot of money to spend on a program in which the effectiveness has not been proven yet.

Hess (2009) conducted a study that focused on what seventeen-year-old students knew upon graduating high school. The concern in this study was that students graduating high school did not have a solid knowledge of the historical and cultural background needed to become responsible citizens when they reached legal adulthood. The CCLS focus on fundamental skills

that are needed to become successful after graduation, but it is argued that the lack of science and liberal arts instruction impedes the goal of what the CCLS set out to do: help students become knowledgeable citizens and achieve college and career readiness (Munson, 2011; Guitierrez, 2014; Exstrom & Thatcher, 2014; Brunner, 2013; Weiner, 2013). In almost all of the top performing nations, the study of the arts, foreign language, science, history, and geography are mandated along with literature (Munson, 2011). A decrease in these programs in United States schools has become increasingly common with the implementation of the CCLS, which focus largely on reading and mathematics.

Over the years, teachers developed a passion for certain curricula. Teachers are worried about the elimination of topics they have taught for many years in which they have developed a deep connection to. According to a recent report, 74 percent of all teachers in Common Core states, said implementation of the standards will require change in their practice (Gewertz, 2014b; Wexler, 2014). Teacher's beliefs and views influence their judgment and determine their level of competence in executing a lesson (Gewertz, 2013; de Vries et al., 2014). Modeling is an important tool in creating positive attitudes in students (Lommen, 2013), so it is important to recognize personal predispositions toward education. Teachers need to find the balance between requirements and their beliefs to induce an excitement for learning. Without proper knowledge of the CCLS, teachers may not possess that ability.

The Role of the Staff. Troia and Olinghouse (2013) identified strengths and limitations of the CCLS in regards to writing and language standards through a theoretically grounded content analysis in their study. They concluded that school psychologists needed to be involved in professional development geared towards writing. They should also be involved with creating networks of resources for research to implement EBP's that would help eliminate barriers of

student success in school. Students with disabilities were already struggling with the curriculum, especially in writing. With the high expectation standards there would be even more struggles, and school psychologists should be prepared to help those students (Troia & Olinghouse, 2013).

The focus of the CCLS shifted more towards non-fictional texts and a focused, guided curriculum (Murphy, 2014; Gewertz, 2013). The CCLS require that 50% of what students read in elementary school be informational text. That percentage increases to 70% in high school. School librarians are becoming the most important resource for giving students the tools and skills needed to ensure they are able to meet the requirements of the CCLS (Uecker, Kelly, & Napierala, 2014). The goal of the school librarian is to influence students to become life-long readers and learners using the Common Core. In order to do this, collaboration between the classroom and library is essential.

The Effects of the CCLS on Students Who Face Various Challenges

It was reported some teachers feel even less prepared to teach students who face challenges such as learning disabilities, language barriers, or poverty (Gewertz, 2014a; Wolf et al., 2014). The CCLS demand more rigorous tasks and texts that English Language Learners (ELL) struggle with. A study conducted by Wolf et al. (2014) examined the challenges teachers and students faced in this area. They concluded that in order to “effectively implement the CCLS with ELL students, it is thus crucial to lay out all the language skills associated with the higher order tasks contained in the standards” (Wolf et al., 2014, p.50). It was also explained there was a strong need for professional development in this area in order to support ELL students and link instruction and assessments with the CCLS.

A qualitative study done by Heskial and Wamba (2013) examined common challenges in Common Core-based writing. Through inquiry/action research, they conducted research in four

Kindergarten classrooms in a low income neighborhood. Three classes were mainstream, and the fourth was a self-contained special education class. There were one hundred and twenty students who partook in a writing workshop for fifty minutes each day. Observations, focus groups, and interviewing were used to collect data.

The data revealed struggles with word spacing, fluency, teacher feedback, and a lack of foundational work. The study concluded that learning to write was complex, and not all students learned the same way. Teachers must be able to initiate differentiated instruction wherever necessary. In regards to the Common Core and writing, it was discovered that teachers supported the CCLS because they initiated teacher reflection, encouraged modeling for students, and prompted teachers to provide a foundation for understanding for each of the four key elements of literacy. It was determined that planning and preparation played a huge role in facilitating the curriculum in an effective and appropriate way to students (Heskial & Wamba, 2013).

Since each state had different standards that may not have accurately measured students' abilities, the initial results of the new common core aligned assessments were very low. Only 31% of students who participated in standardized testing in spring 2014 reached a level of competence in English Language Arts in New York State (Weingarten et al., 2014).

Utah Senator Howard Stephenson said the following:

We were led to believe that 90% of our students were proficient in English Language Arts only to find out from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) that 36% were proficient. We need good, honest data so we can make good policy decisions” (Exstrom & Thatcher, 2014, p. 24).

Many other factors were hindering students' academic achievement before the CCLS were implemented. Poverty, lack of food, not having health care, disabilities, and little to no

access to literature can have a major influence on whether children are able to achieve in education (Murphy, 2014; Krashen, 2014; Wexler, 2014). The Common Core does not address how to improve those issues. These factors held a huge concern for both parents and teachers (Troia & Olinghouse, 2013).

The Effects of the CCLS on Families

A lack of higher education may cause a decrease in parent involvement in their child's education. Hess (2009) discovered that seventeen-year-old students with at least one parent that attended college, scored one to two grades higher than seventeen-year-old students whose parents did not attend college. Parent involvement in their child's education is highly valuable to their success. Parent involvement such as tutoring, participation in school events, volunteer work, and reading at home have proved to increase academic achievement (Fishel & Ramirez, 2005; Thornton, 2013; Jacobs-Israel, 2012).

McKenna and Millen (2013) conducted a qualitative grounded theory study to develop an understanding of parent involvement. Five female participants were purposefully sampled for data collection through focus groups and a writing experience. Four of the five participants were single mothers and employed. They discovered single parents did their best to make sure their children had all their basic needs, and teachers did not always understand how much more important that was to parents at times than school work. It concluded that family involvement is key to the success of students in school. The researchers also revealed it is important for school personnel and educators to eliminate preconceived stereotypes about parents, (i.e. parents not caring about their child's school work due to low income or race), make an effort to communicate, and involve parents as much as possible to continue progressing education in the right direction.

The Common Core based curriculum that is being implemented in schools today, focus on the foundation of a topic in order to understand the topic in its entirety. The steps to solve a math problem are no longer what they used to be, which can pose a problem for parents who do not know this new way of learning (Michael, 2014; Neuman & Roskos, 2013; Delguidice & Luna, 2013). Parents of K-12 students were surveyed by the Associated Press and the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) for Public Affairs Research, and the results yielded that 52 percent were barely educated about Common Core or not educated at all (Maxwell, 2013). In a poll by Achieve, *Growing Awareness, Growing Support: Teacher and Voter Understanding of the Common Core State Standards & Assessments*, 79 percent of registered voters expressed the same results (Delguidice & Luna, 2013; Achieve, 2012). The national survey consisted of 1000 registered voters and 500 K-12 teachers (Achieve, 2012).

Neuman and Roskos (2013) argued the CCLS place “students, parents, teachers, and school administrators all on the same page” (p.9) about what is expected at each grade level, but when parents lack knowledge about those expectations, it is hard for them to be supportive and involved in their child’s education. Students need their voices to be heard, and active, engaged families need to advocate for them (Thornton, 2013). Sixty-two percent of 1,000 American parent participants eighteen years or older were surveyed by Phi Delta Kappa and Gallup. They revealed they knew nothing about the Common Core Learning Standards (Maxwell, 2013). Approximately 40,000 students in New York State alone chose to opt-out of the Common Core tests (Weingarten et al., 2014). The question was whether those parents were educated enough to make that decision for their children. Since the CCLS have had a tremendous impact on the lives of students, it is important for parents and teachers to be competent when it comes to what students are expected to know and how they are going to learn it.

Deficiencies in the Literature

Based on the reviewed literature, there is a strong need for professional development and informational resources to supplement the lack of knowledge and communication about the CCLS to families and teachers.

The resources focused broadly on how the CCLS separately affect teachers and parents, but not what their perceptions of the Common Core were. The research also lacked descriptive, detailed, and specific experiences of how the CCLS has affected local education. Information regarding parental involvement with the new standards was scarce. The goal of this study was to provide parents and teachers with a voice to advocate their opinions, concerns, and experiences with the CCLS. This study aimed to produce an explanation for how parents and teachers feel the way they do about the CCLS.

Method

Phenomenological Research Design

This study exploited the phenomenological research approach in which the researcher translated the actual experiences of those who have been involved with the phenomenon through the interviewing process. Creswell stated the objective of phenomenological research is to describe a “lived experience” of a phenomenon (2014). In this particular study, the phenomenon was the implementation of the CCLS. Since the goal of the research was to find out how the CCLS affected local parents’ and teachers’ perceptions on their child’s learning, a qualitative phenomenological approach was appropriate. Personal experiences described by the participants allowed for a better understanding of the local impact of the CCLS. This description revealed the similarities and differences between individuals’ experiences.

The Researcher's Role

Since qualitative research is largely interpretive, it was important to identify personal biases, values, background, and relation to research sites that may have had an impact on interpretation (Creswell, 2014). My views of the Common Core Learning Standards have been molded by the education I received at Buffalo State College in Buffalo, New York, as well as the State University of New York at Fredonia in New York. My college education took place at a time when the implementation of these standards was becoming increasingly common. Most of my classes were centered on the foundation and incorporation of the CCLS that it became natural to plan a CCLS-focused curriculum. I have had a positive view towards what the standards are trying to accomplish, which may differ from the views of this study's participants. I have understood that individuals come from a variety of environments that have the potential to influence their experiences.

I have held a high respect for education and believe it is important in the future success of students. My positive attitude toward education did not influence the way I interpreted the data. I was able to present the stories from the participants' perspective as it was and remained sensitive to various issues and experiences that had arisen during the study.

Participants and Research Site

This study was executed in Western New York. Participants were elementary school teachers in rural public schools who taught in the general education classroom in grades Kindergarten through fifth grade. Participants were also parents who had at least one child in a rural public school in Western New York in grades Kindergarten through seventh grade. Participants were chosen randomly. School principals were contacted for the recommendation of teacher participants. Invitations were sent home with students to parents. Interviews were

conducted in-person to develop a personal rapport with the participants. The data collection took place at locations selected mutually by the interviewer and interviewee. All teacher participants were asked the same set of questions (See Appendix A for this set of interview questions). All parent/guardian participants were asked the same set of questions, but the questions will be worded differently from the teacher interview questions (See Appendix B for this set of interview questions). Qualitative studies are continuously being developed, so the questions can be adapted accordingly during the interviews. One question was added to both lists of interview questions during the first interview: How do you think the CCLS will affect your child/your students when they graduate high school? No questions had arisen post-interview, so a second interview was not necessary at a later date. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed into text.

The research ensured the protection of the rights and values of the participants. The research objectives were conveyed verbally and in writing to the informant. Written consent was obtained prior to the interview. A Request for Human Subjects Review was filed with the Institutional Review Board at the State University of New York at Fredonia. Transcriptions and interpretations of the interview were made available for participant review upon request. Any specific request made by the participant was considered prior to interpreting and publishing the data. Information that could personally identify the participant has been kept anonymous.

Data Collection

Any data collection method that captured the participants experience with the Common Core was used; however, for this study, semi-structured interviews posed as the most effective tool. These semi-structured interviews were open-ended which allowed the interviewer to provoke new ideas and thoughts based upon what the interviewee said. Questions in the

interview prompted the participants to answer in their own words without suggesting what their description should have been like. The answers were derived from their experiences and initiated by their own thoughts (Waters, n.d.). Participants were encouraged to provide full details of their Common Core experiences that included feelings, thoughts, memories, and images. Data were collected beginning in late February 2015 through March 10, 2015. During this time, interviews consisting of approximately ten questions were conducted yielding a duration of approximately 30 minutes. Interviews were audio taped, and the information presented by individuals during the in-person interviews were transcribed verbatim into text. One interview was completed by each participant. Follow up questions were not necessary.

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data and provide an interpretation of the information presented in the interview, hand coding was used to identify common themes among the data. Interviews were read through thoroughly, and coded into similar categories to better interpret the data (Creswell, 2014). Each code was supported with specific declarations from the interviews, detailed descriptions, and various direct quotations. The coding of the data followed the nature of the data by analyzing the interviews and identifying common themes. Aspects that were considered when coding were the environment, objects, characters, social interactions, types of activities, outcomes, and time of references (Waters, n.d.).

The data yielded many similarities and differences. Some common themes derived from the interviews included frustration, communication, curriculum, professional development, and the long term effects of the CCLS. Under each theme, different codes were identified to separate what the participants said about each theme. For example, parents and teachers were frustrated about homework, change, lack of differentiation, etc. Once the themes and codes were

discovered, a table was developed to compare what each interviewee said in the interviews about each theme and code.

Results

The results were developed from the semi-structured interviews after a thorough analysis of each participants statements. Once the data was sorted, direct quotes and summaries were used from the interviews to support each statement. The categories discovered were frustration, communication, curriculum, professional development, and the long term effects of the CCLS.

Frustration

Throughout the interviews, frustration seemed to be a common theme amongst the parents and teachers. The teachers felt frustrated because of the one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and learning; whereas the parents were frustrated by their inability to be able to help their children with academic work at home.

Implementation. The CCLS have provoked a lot of negative frustration among parents and teachers, which according to one participant might have been due to the “rollout of it and maybe the rationale behind it.” The participants felt the CCLS should not have been put into place in every grade at the start of the same school year. Parents and teachers felt it should have been started in Kindergarten. They argued those students in higher grades who were never introduced to the background information would struggle with the new ways and materials associated with the Common Core. One teacher stated, “I think the way they implemented it was completely wrong. I think there’s some stress on kids because they’re already being thrown into it without having the background knowledge and background information and building blocks.” Only one parent felt her child has not been affected by the new way of thinking because that is

all he has ever known. However, she did agree that if they were in fifth or sixth grade and they were trying to get into it, it would be completely new and they would not understand it.

The implementation of the CCLS was a lot to handle at such a fast pace. One teacher agreed with challenging the students, but she has had an issue with how it was rolled out. It was too much, too fast. The people behind the CCLS did not think of how big of an impact it would have on students and the help they would need. She said, "You've got twenty-one or twenty-two children in one classroom, and you know ten of them are struggling that bad, the teacher has to help them. So you kind of stop and think to yourself-to integrate this program into the elementary level, you need more than one teacher in the classroom. The state was asking an awful lot to expect one teacher to do this."

There was not much information given to help parents understand what was going to happen when it was implemented. One parent complained, "I think it was pretty presumptuous that we knew what was going to happen, and we didn't. As a parent I reach out to anybody. I don't think the school district did a good job of educating the parents of how this was all going to go down."

Difficulty of Change. Change is hard, so when the CCLS was introduced, this change caused a lot of difficulty in schools and at home. Some teacher's attitudes reflected negatively in their career. A Kindergarten teacher revealed, "Anytime there is change, there's going to be controversy. So many people's attitudes can get bogged down with the heaviness of everything-not only with the CCLS, but with the funding and budgets and money that supports all this. It can be very challenging. I'm with Kindergarteners all day. If I have this negative attitude, that's going to suck for them. You have to remember you're there for them. I know teachers who carry a heavy burden of this, and it shows up in everything they do."

The shift in education has caused a sudden change in the way students are taught. Students have been failing because of how their success was measured. One parent identified the impact of this change in her daughter's school. "Last year, I was told that 50 percent of fourth graders were failing half way through the school year because they were just thrown into the Common Core. They weren't being taught that back in Kindergarten or first grade." The rigor and the level of work they have been required to do now has significantly increased since before the Common Core. "There's more frustration from the students. The work is harder. The reading is harder. We've had to slow things down. We ended up doing things that would be considered to be independent with them because we're not sure they're understanding things. I see more frustration with the difficulty of the questions they're required to do," said one fifth grade teacher. Students who were already having difficulty with school are having an even harder time. One parent exclaimed, "So my fifth grader-who was already having a little trouble with school-was put into a program that he really started to struggle in." This change in expectations has caused a lot of stress in students. A fourth grade teacher said, "This year, I have about ten students who have anxiety issues. They just aren't kids anymore. They seemed to be robbed of that childhood, which is such a shame."

Parents have been struggling with this mind-shift in thinking as well. In comparison to the past, they felt as though it is harder for them to help their child at home. One parent said, "We really can't help him as much as we were able to help his older brother and sister who never had to do Common Core." Teachers felt it was easier for the students to adjust at a young age versus the parents. One teacher makes a point to explain to parents that, "It's upsetting to us as adults because we did not learn this way, but we have to unlearn the old ways and relearn new

ways. Your kids aren't doing that. They're learning this way for the first time, so it's not an unlearn-relearn situation for them. It is for us, so it's harder for us to do it than for the kids."

The Common Core has had just as big of an impact on teachers as it has had on students. Since it happened so quickly, the teachers were trying their best to adjust to the changes, but it has not been easy. And parents recognized that. One parent stated, "I'm finding [teachers] are just as frustrated as we were when they're trying to start these kids that have not been learning that way. These kids have been taught one certain way, and they got to fifth grade, and all of a sudden it's changed." Teachers have been finding it hard to accommodate the CCLS in their classrooms. A first grade teacher said she has been teaching to the best of her ability to match the Common Core Learning Standards, but if a student did not understand something, she taught it her way. "To be honest, I'm doing the best I can to implement it. If the kids in here get it, they get it. If they don't, I revert back to what I know works. It's very difficult to teach a method you don't understand yourself. I reverted back to 'This is how I would've done it,' so there's your training right out the window." Her statement reflected a prime example of the difficulty of differentiated instruction in the classroom. Teachers have been expected to teach the Common Core a certain way, but since children learn at different paces in different ways, that has not always been possible.

One-Size-Fits-All. In the past, altering instruction was part of teaching; however, teachers and some parents were frustrated with how difficult it became to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all children. One teacher agreed, "I think it's actually harder to differentiate with the Common Core because it's so specific." All teachers agreed that individuals learn in different ways, and there is not one way to do something. "They're not all going to be on the same page at the same time." Teachers believe in differentiation, "but with the

new standards, it's more of a frustration opposed to a differentiation." Teachers felt if they were supposed to be meeting the needs of all learners, then the evaluations need to be differentiated as well. One teacher said, "On one hand you're telling me to differentiate to meet the needs of all the learners in my classroom, but you're not differentiating your assessments or outcomes or expectations for kids, and I think that's wrong."

Due to the fact that students were not all on the same level, teachers believed altering instruction was more difficult because they spent so much time working with the low students because the academic level had been increased. A fifth grade teacher said, "For those lower level students, it's hard to make it too differentiated because they have to have the rigor. How simplified can you make it without losing the message?" Another teacher said she has spent a lot of time trying to catch up the low level students and not enough time meeting the needs of the at-level and high-level students. "When there's one teacher in the classroom, the ones that don't get it, I'm spending more and more time on the low end, so the high end is basically on their own, and that's not good. I'm spending so much time getting the low ones up to at least grade level, that I'm almost neglecting the high students." One parent participant voiced her concern that other children were receiving more attention and guidance in the classroom than her daughter. "It's affecting [my daughter] because a lot of the kids in the class are doing worse than her. So poor [teacher] has to stop and help them, and [my daughter's] not getting the extra help."

Teachers and parents both agreed that the Common Core is a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching, and that it has not been the best method to meet the needs of children academically, socially, or emotionally. One teacher said, "It's a cookie cutter program that everybody should fit into and because people are individuals, they don't fit into what's expected of them. And if they don't fit, there's a lot of frustration in the children."

Parents were concerned for children who did not relate to the Common Core approach to problem solving, but could solve the problem their own way. They felt as though the students have been occluded because they did not fit into the uniform way of the Common Core academics. One parent expressed concern for the students who have not adjusted well to the CCLS. "There's a sense of ostracization when you don't catch stuff. Any second grader in elementary school in math-they have that when they can't do what the Common Core is asking them to do. They've got to Common reasoning. They've got the six plus five. They got the answer to that; they understand that, but they can't break it down. So those kids are being ostracized. They're being put into special classes. They got the answer right, but because they didn't show the right steps or did it a different way than the Common Core, they got it wrong."

Another parent made an analogy that explained how the Common Core is a one-size-fits-all approach to learning. "I don't think [my son's] brain works the same way. I kind of enlighten it to Mac versus PC computers. Mac computers are so much easier because it's the way your brain thinks; it's intuitive. And a PC is comparable to the Common Core. You have to learn it in order to know how to do it. It's really a disservice to everybody saying there's only one way to do math."

New Vocabulary. Concerns were expressed by participants that there was a completely different and complex vocabulary being used with the Common Core. Parents and teachers found it difficult to understand expectations because the terminology is prominent. A first grade teacher participant talked about a particular topic she could not teach because of its content. "Part of the math curriculum has this 'make a ten' philosophy. I can't teach it because I don't get it. First grade! It didn't come natural." A parent confessed it was hard for her to understand what her daughter is learning because of the advanced language on the homework and on notes from the

teacher. "There's a whole other vocabulary being used with the Common Core that none of the parents have been informed of. So even when the teacher will correct her papers and send them home for us to review and for her to correct, we don't even know the verbiage that she is writing. We don't even know what she is referencing."

Students who did not start the Common Core in Kindergarten were not as familiar with the vocabulary being used. In comparison with those students who have only ever known the Common Core approach, it has been difficult to teach and learn. A fourth grade teacher explained, "Kids that have come in here this year had some Common Core in second grade, third grade, and now fourth grade, where my daughter is in Kindergarten-she's starting with Common Core. So there's gaps in their vocabulary-in their understanding-that are hard to fill."

Homework. Parent participants spoke very strongly about the challenges they faced when it came to helping their children with homework. They struggled with the amount of time it took to do the homework because neither they nor their child could understand it. A parent explained that her daughter used to love math in Kindergarten, but now in second grade, her daughter has dreaded it. "It's very confusing for her and for us. We were told that her homework in first grade should not be any more than twenty minutes. We were at the kitchen table for one full hour to do four math problems last year. I mean talk about a nervous breakdown for her and for us. And then, she ended up getting them all wrong!"

The fact that parents were unable to assist their children at home has affected the children as well. One parent said, "I feel it affected [my son] more to the fact that I didn't understand how it was equated into what it came to be. It was confusing at first." Another parent admitted, "We can't help him with his homework. When he comes home, if they're teaching him a certain way

to do their math problems, we can't help him. He was beginning to feel like a failure and that he was stupid, and he's not. It was hard for us because we didn't understand it."

Parents had to go online to look up answers to their child's homework and look up how to do the problems which was time consuming. A parent complained, "It makes the homework take longer because we have to look up the proper way to answer a question even though we can come up with the correct answer." One parent of a second grade student felt that parents almost had to become a teacher themselves in order to be able to help at home with homework. "Before we can sit down and check and help her with her homework, we have to go online to make sure we're doing it the right way. It's like you have to be a teacher yourself now."

Teachers understood the challenges families have faced at home with homework. They knew they were frustrated. A teacher conveyed, "Parents are frustrated. I feel their pain. I've heard parents at the dance studio saying things like, 'Well, I can help them through second grade, but after that, they're on their own.' They're trying to be involved, but it's hard for them to do it." Another fourth grade teacher said, "I think parents are really frustrated. Even more than the teachers. They want to be able to help their child, but they're finding they cannot-especially with the math. They just don't know how to help their child, and it's really frustrating for them. A lot of the time, they get just as anxious as the kids do."

Lack of Time. In such a fast-paced world, teachers have struggled to find enough time to adjust to the CCLS. Since the CCLS were put into place so quickly, one district did not have time to adapt, and thus they adopted the CCLS and had just been using the modules. Two teachers exclaimed there seemed to be so much to do and not enough time. The Common Core has caused teachers to feel pressured with the work load in conjunction with time. Teachers agreed that free time is necessary for learning, but since the Common Core Learning Standards

have been implemented, free time has been decreasing in local classrooms. A fourth grade teacher participant said, "The kids are expected to do a lot more. Unfortunately, there's not a lot of kid time. There's a lot of business. There's not a lot of free time. Doing something like project-based learning really isn't something we have time for."

Lack of Resources. Teachers concurred they could always use more materials than what they have. They were not given enough resources to successfully support the Common Core in and out of the classroom. Parents were also not given good resources from the start. One teacher said, "I think the one thing I'm missing is the parent link. There's not much out there. Seriously, am I supposed to send them to EngageNY so they can help their child? It's not good stuff." A parent agreed, "I think the state should've given out a little more manuals or pamphlets on 'This is how we're going to do this, so you can understand.' I feel bad for the lower income families who don't have college degrees or the resources or even just the patience to do the research to look this up."

Three teachers said they were not given materials other than the modules that go along with the Common Core to use in combination with the modules and curriculum. Teachers have had to create materials themselves and share them with coworkers. "The tools and materials I use are teacher generated and shared by coworkers. It does not come from administration."

Lack of Balance. Balance is an extremely important part of education, but since the CCLS has been initiated, that sense of balance has disappeared. A Kindergarten teacher explained, "Kids need opportunities to just be kids, and with the rigor of the Common Core, it has to be balanced. We want to have that balance and let them explore, discover, etc." However, with the higher expectations, teachers were not always able to achieve it. She continued to say, "I think it takes a good teacher to be able to balance everything, and I hate to hear when teachers in

classrooms and districts are just teaching to the test and letting recess go by the wayside or choice time or playtime or even Drop Everything and Read (D.E.A.R.). It's a disservice to the students and that's not okay."

Other educational activities and teaching styles have been eliminated as well due to a very structured school day. A fourth grade teacher said, "We kind of slip [project-based learning] in when we can just because it's kind of important to get those kids learning in a different way, but it's very much so-the kids listen, they do the worksheet, and they get tested on it. Unfortunately, it's not a lot of ten year old friendly material and not a ten year old friendly day." Another teacher dictated a similar statement, "We try to add things in to be fun, but some of the things that were extra and fun and projects have to go."

Parents also have had many things to balance at home, and with the difficulty of the Common Core impairing parent's abilities to help their children at home, that balance has been disrupted. One parent spoke with concern for other families who may be at a disadvantage when it comes to helping their child with school work on top of being their caregiver. "I'm thinking [about single parents]. They don't necessarily have the accessibility I have. They don't have the team support at home. It used to be you sent your kids to school and the teachers taught your kids. Now you have to be a teacher at home, too. Parents are so busy teaching life cycles, they're not ready to teach school cycles as well."

Struggles Due to the Common Core. Parents, teachers, and students struggled to adjust to the Common Core demands. When it came to the long term effects of this reform, parents wanted to be able to be there for their children, but have found they cannot when it came to academics. One father declared, "Everybody wants to be there for their kids and answer things, but if the child doesn't feel they can go to their parent, they're not going to go to their parent."

Children have needed the support of their families and parents did not want to feel responsible for their child not being able to succeed in school. One parent stated, "I don't want to feel responsible for her failing that question or getting it wrong because I don't understand it or know how to help her work through it."

Teachers were concerned for those students that are at-risk and the struggle they face to reach high school graduation. One teacher predicted, "if the districts and the state don't do something soon, they're going to have a lot of drug addicts who drop out of school because that's what implementing the Regents did when they implemented that x amount of years ago." Students may not be able to handle the pressure associated with the CCLS if it continues through college. One Kindergarten teacher participant hoped the Common Core will not be too daunting for them, but she admitted it might be that way for at-risk students that have disabilities or need additional supports. "If they don't get that support, I could see where it gets overwhelming. It would be a disservice." One parent also reported the Common Core has cost billions of dollars to add more supports and remedial classes into schools and believed it is affecting all children in and out of the classrooms. "It's costing taxpayers billions having all the remedial classes and students push-in. My daughter said, 'They're not dumb mom. They're smart. They just need help.' She must've heard that somewhere." Students have not been with their classmates or their general education teacher all day as a result of those extra supports, which can be difficult for everyone.

Communication

Communication is the link between what happens at school and at home. Most parent participants felt they were not as informed as they would have liked to have been about the CCLS. Parents had to do a lot of research on their own and felt they have not been receiving

many updates. Teachers concluded parents did not know what to expect because no one had informed them well enough for them to understand.

Initial Awareness of the Common Core Learning Standards. Communication has been the key to helping families and school staff stay connected. In regards to making parents aware of what the CCLS are and how they would affect their child's education, parents felt there was not anything that specifically prepared them for what was to come. Parents mainly learned about the CCLS through outside sources other than school. For example, one participant said she heard about the Common Core "just through exposure. Nothing other than trying to do homework, hearing it on the news and Facebook." The parent of a fourth grade student and a seventh grade student also heard about it through the media and through what little information her children brought home from school.

Parents agreed there should have been more awareness in the beginning, and only two parent participants said teachers have been doing their best to keep them informed and help them work through this process. One parent felt the teachers have done quite a bit. "They've had some night time meetings. I didn't attend them, but they offered them." Another parent said, "In second grade, my daughter's teacher sent home a book which was very helpful because the website was overwhelming. She knows we know this is hard, so she's really educating us well."

Updates about the CCLS. There was a lot of confusion due to a lack of communication. Three parents conveyed they have received occasional updates about the Common Core, however the information they received was not as cohesive and in-depth as they would have liked. One parent voiced her frustration. "Her teachers only kept us informed through the classroom newsletter and notes coming home in her backpack. That was really the only way we found out about what was happening, and maybe it was an assumption that we did know about it,

but we didn't. We didn't really understand it without our own research." One parent in particular felt teachers do not know how to communicate with parents about the CCLS. "I feel like there's not a lot of communication because I feel the teachers aren't being informed about how to talk to the parents and how to relate the Common Core ideals and standards to parents."

Parents felt confused because they were not being informed or kept up-to-date with current changes in information. One parent said, "There's no communication about what's expected of kids and the new standards and how they're teaching the kids and how this is changing." Parents did not understand how this reform was supposed to be enhancing their child's educational success. One mother said, "They say it's supposed to be helping our kids understand schooling better. I don't find that with [my son]. He really struggles with it." There was also confusion because of the lack in communication between the child and parent. Another parent revealed, "If your child hasn't given you adequate information about how they're learning in school...we didn't know that we were going to have to go online and look for it. We weren't informed of that."

Because the CCLS is so new, teachers felt the community and families were extremely disconcerted by this change in thinking. "For many parents, this is their first time coming into the elementary setting. A lot of parents do not know what to expect." Teachers also felt parents did not understand the difference between all of the different components of the current educational reform. A fourth grade teacher said, "I struggle with the people out there who are so vocal with the negative aspects of the Common Core because that just seems to me like they don't truly understand it. Like they are getting the Common Core confused with state testing and with the politics of things. They see it all encompassing one umbrella."

Curriculum

A changing curriculum has been a part of education for years. With the implementation of the CCLS, it has caused even more change than usual. Parents and teachers both noticed a decrease in developmentally appropriate practices and an increase in the difficulty of the assessments. Most teachers felt the CCLS have given themselves and students a more concrete understanding of the concepts and skills they learned in the classroom.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice. Participants believed this new rigorous curriculum has eliminated a lot of the hands-on and explorative learning that children need. One parent said, "I think they're learning less at school, and there's not as much hands-on learning. I don't know how to put it, but in third grade we made peanut butter. We grew lima bean plants. They don't have time for that stuff, so they're not learning...basic skills." A teacher revealed, "They just seem to be robbed of that childhood which is such a shame. The kids can do it. They can take on the challenge; they do it, and they do a nice job with it, but it's just a lot of mental work. A lot more than we've ever seen." Parents have realized the amount of work is too much. "You've saturated them to the point where you've made them and made them learn, and then it's all mental overload, so they totally shut down, and they don't retain at all. I know with my daughter. She can remember three things. The amount of steps in the Common Core problems is a lot."

Due to all the increased mental work, there has not been a lot of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) in the new curriculum. The education children have received needed to be cohesive with the level of learning each child could handle, but both teachers and parents noticed a decrease in that. One first grade teacher explained, "The children who understand this Common Core level of thinking, understand it. Those who don't are not developmentally ready

for that information yet.” Parents also noticed a change in their children’s attitude toward education. One parent said, “I think the Common Core has just sucked a lot of the enjoyment out of things. There’s not a lot of letting kids be kids.” However, just one parent believed that “kids are more ready to learn with the new technologies” that have been introduced, “with the iPads and use of that.”

Testing. Teachers did not agree with how the state tests dictated what to teach and when to teach it. One teacher said, “We have a standard to teach and a job to do, and unfortunately the high stakes testing kind of dictates what we need to teach and when we need to teach it.” Students who were already having difficulty with the curriculum before the CCLS, were now struggling even more, and it made it hard to prepare for tests. The CCLS have had a more adverse effect on students with special needs. One teacher revealed, “I feel like in addition to the kids IEP goals, I have to keep the Common Core in mind to make them as ready for these assessments as I possibly can because the kids I tend to work with don’t always have those skills. It doubles the impact for them.”

Not everyone learns the same way or at the same pace, which caused trouble when it came time to take the Regents exam in high school. There was an immense amount of pressure on students in everyday life. But when it came to testing, that pressure exceeded to a higher level. One parent explained, “My coworker’s son is fourteen and struggling. And then you throw in the Common Core, and then you throw in the Regents. So much pressure is on these kids for acceptance and learning and sexual, but the educational pressure is three times worse than when I was in school.”

Teachers did not feel students should be required to take these high stakes tests if they are not ready for them. One teacher commented, “Not everyone is Regents material. Not everybody

is at that level. Not everybody thinks that way.” Another teacher agreed. “We have a population of children who shouldn’t be required to take Regents exams, and should not be required. We need plumbers and electricians. We need those vocational people, and those vocational programs are all getting cut because everyone is required to be on the Regents track.” Parents have been increasingly opting their children out of state tests. One teacher opted her fifth grade daughter out of the state tests last year, and will do so again this year. “We put her in AIS. We know she needs help. We’re not in denial, but we want the teacher to be the one to say she needs the help—not these totally broken tests.”

Parents have seen the increasingly negative experiences their children have had with the high stakes testing. One mother said, “My son starts worrying about tests months before despite everyone telling him they don’t count. It does count though, and then they feel bad about themselves when they don’t do well.” This parent’s daughter was only able to sit and stare at a wall for a long time upon the completion of a test in elementary school because the teacher said that was all she could do. Another parent explained that in third grade her daughter “was getting up half way through the night thinking she wasn’t going to get through third grade because the test was so hard and so long.” It was hard for teachers to watch their students become extremely stressed over these tests. “The very first state test that was given in 2013, one student I had cried through the entire thing. The testing is so daunting on them.”

Foundational Understanding. The CCLS were designed to provide students with a solid understanding of each concept and topic they learn. Overall, teachers felt both themselves and students have gained just that. Most parents agreed, but two felt it has been too difficult for themselves and their children to comprehend.

Most teachers felt like the Common Core has provided both themselves and their students with a better and deeper understanding of each topic. One fourth grade teacher dictated, "If a house doesn't have a good foundation, you can't build on it, and I think the CCLS provides us with a solid foundation." Some teachers have seen the Common Core work, therefore they believe in it. One fourth grade teacher participant described her experience as a teacher last year implementing the CCLS. "I took the low group last year and was expecting them to fall flat on their faces. Math particularly was a struggle. But by the end of the year, I have never had a class with better number sense in my nine years of teaching, which is why I like the CCLS-because I've seen it do its job and work." Some teachers also felt like they have gained a better understanding of each topic because it has been so repetitive and in-depth. Another fourth grade teacher explained, "I feel like I'm teaching from a different lense. I can teach all of the foundational things going into a topic. I personally have a better idea of what we're doing because it's so much of it over and over again."

Some parents did not agree. They struggled with the way they learned versus the way children are learning now when it comes to math. One parent said, "Math is one of our biggest problems because neither my husband nor I can understand the breakdown of learning how to add or subtract. Our conventional way of learning didn't teach us like that." Parents and teachers eluded to the mathematics in lower grades simulating a more algebraic approach to learning. However, one parent felt that her son was at an advantage because he had learned this way at a young age versus a high school student who has just started to learn in conjunction with the Common Core. "I think and feel since he started it at a younger age, he is benefitting more rather than a high school student who already has the basics, but is having to relearn a different way of learning the basics in addition to complex math."

While most participants felt the Common Core has caused frustration, one teacher thought the Common Core has not been in effect long enough to see if it is having a positive or negative effect on education. She explained, "I know there's people screaming we need to get rid of it. No, I don't think we get rid of it. We give it a shot, and two and a half years isn't enough time."

Professional Development

All the teacher participants have had some sort of professional development about the CCLS. Some teacher's training focused more on solely the standards, others on math, and some was just an overview. Three teachers deemed the professional development they received incomplete and not applicable to their needs. One first grade teacher said, "From where we started, to where we ended up were two different animals. The path kept changing. It was like they were writing the standards as they were teaching us and changing along the way." Another teacher expressed the same concern with the training she received. "Everything seemed to make sense the way the presenter said things, and then when the tests came out, it didn't match what we initially thought we were in for." Teachers have had to take it upon themselves to research the CCLS on their own and applied what they learned to their classroom. A Kindergarten teacher said, "It was not very comprehensive training or professional development. It wasn't specific to my grade level. It was overview and wasn't practical or useful to my classroom, so what I learned or acquired about the Common Core is really what I've learned on my own." Only two teachers described their training as effective.

Long Term Effects of the CCLS

The CCLS have provoked concern in many ways. Parents and teachers voiced their opinion and thoughts about how the CCLS would affect the future if the reform continues. Most

parents and some teachers felt educational decisions should return to local control. Participants also described what they felt children will endure upon graduating high school.

Control of Education. Many parent participants wanted the control of education to return to local hands by eliminating the Common Core. They believed the community should be more involved in decision making. One parent felt our nation has been trying to compete with world education, but did not agree with how the government has done this. One parent said, "I hope the assessments would fall more into local hands so we could have more of a say in things, so they're useable, doable, and age appropriate." Another parent talked about the elimination of the CCLS. "My main reason for disliking it, is the government agency dictates how children are taught. I think it should be handled locally. I think each district needs to be in charge of how they're teaching in their schools, and without the Common Core, they'd have that ability."

Beyond Graduation. Many participants spoke about how the Common Core will affect children upon graduation and beyond. They had mixed feelings. Some felt students are not going to be well rounded or prepared for life outside of school. "I think they're going to need to understand things the Common Core can't teach you. The Common Core can't teach you common sense." A first grade teacher believed students who would normally end up taking the vocational route are not going to have high school degrees. "Our society's going to be screwed up and have a lot of dropouts. We're going to have a lot of kids on medication because there's a lot of frustration even in first grade, so there's going to be a drug problem. That's my prophecy- when these kids are seniors, they're going to be on drugs and dropping out of school." Another teacher agreed by predicting that she can see a lot of kids moving toward careers that do not require college degrees. Those kids who may have normally made it through a two year degree, may choose a career in which they do not need college to obtain it because they struggled

achieving the Common Core expectations. A second grade student's parent felt her daughter would do fine through high school and college, but when it came time for her to begin her career, she thought that was where the problem would lie. "When she goes into her career, those people she's working with won't necessarily have the Common Core training, so there's going to be a learning curve for her going into the workforce because all of the Dyno grades and Mogues out there-they aren't going to adapt Common Core into their engineering departments. They're going to do it the way they've conventionally done it." The unpredictability of the future was a concern among parents and teachers alike.

Contrarily, some teachers were excited to see where children will end up. They held a positive expectation of the Common Core and what it could provide children with after graduation. One teacher said, "I think they're going to have a better foundational understanding. I went and read in my daughter's Kindergarten class, and just the things she's doing as a five year old is amazing to me. She's reading real words. She's putting sounds together. She understands how a word breaks down."

Only two parents predicted the Common Core would continue to help students beyond high school. A parent explained, "I think they'll be more ready for hopefully some more advanced math or maybe it'll take them further than maybe a two year high school math. Once you understand math and concepts of math, things are broken down that way in everyday life. So if you have a good understanding, you can have successful decision making skills because of the math." Another parent revealed that the future is unpredictable, but she hoped the CCLS would help them.

Discussion and Conclusion

Overview of Study and Findings

The CCLS have impacted the lives of children, teachers, and parents in schools across the United States. In rural Western New York, parent and teacher participants revealed the many challenges they have faced in schools today during a one-on-one interview.

The data proclaimed there was a lot of negative attention toward the CCLS from parents mainly because the new shift in education was put into place so fast. They were unsure of the purpose of the Common Core and not only have they seen their children struggling in school, but parents have struggled to help their children to homework at home. The methods and strategies have changed so much that they have found it difficult to assist their children. They also disagreed with the advanced vocabulary that has been used because it was confusing to both parents and children.

Teachers understood that parents were concerned with this reform, and most teachers were frustrated as well. It was too much, too fast. Teachers saw a decrease in hands-on learning, vocational studies, free time, and developmentally appropriate practice. They felt inadequately trained and prepared for the CCLS.

Only one parent felt the CCLS have not negatively impacted her children. Although they did not agree with how fast it was implemented, two of the five teachers felt that overall, the Common Core has been a positive change to education. They felt the CCLS provided students with more in-depth instruction and understanding.

Significance of the Findings

The findings have brought attention to the concerns and observations of parents and teachers regarding the CCLS in a small area of New York State. The findings were very important to answering the initial questions presented in the study:

- 1) What are the teachers' perceptions of the CCLS on their teaching?
- 2) What are parents' perceptions of the impact of the CCLS on their child's learning?

The findings proclaimed important feedback from those affected by the CCLS that could prove useful in determining future educational changes. The opinions, experiences, comments, and other information revealed in this study identifies potential problems, struggles, and positive aspects of the CCLS through real life reports. These data render crucial to the field of education because there has not been a lot of research completed about the CCLS and how it is perceived by parents and teachers.

Limitations of the Study

The participants were parents and teachers of students in grades Kindergarten through seventh grade in a general education classroom. The findings may not be able to be generalized to other grades or settings that were not included in this study. The findings suggested that if the sampling was taken randomly from a larger selection of participants in various settings, it would provide a deeper analysis of the themes presented in the research.

There number of participants for this research was reduced due to a short amount of time to collect data. Some parents and teachers were unresponsive during the allotted time because of weather, school vacations, and personal schedules. Initially, participants from more school districts were to be invited to complete the research, but the limited time caused the number to be reduced. There also might have been a small number of participants because the Common Core

is still new, and people may still be unsure of how they feel about it causing them not to respond. The data was only collected through interviews. With a variety of data collection methods, a deeper understanding could be developed.

Conclusion

In summary, the CCLS have caused many to express concerns for current education. This study was designed to decipher what local teachers' and parents' perceptions of the CCLS were. Through a phenomenological study, it was determined that participants in this study had mostly negative perceptions of the Common Core Learning Standards. The findings illustrated that most of the interviewed parents and teachers were frustrated with how the CCLS have impacted the many aspects of local education. They have done their best to adjust to the change, but hope for as resolution to the issues presented in this study. With more time, a larger selection of participants and a broader demographic, more perceptions of teachers and parents can be discovered about the CCLS.

Future Research

This research was based on a select few schools in Western New York. In future research, a broader demographic would be helpful in determining the perceptions of parents and teachers on a larger scale. It would be interesting to compare and contrast the perceptions of parents and teachers in urban and suburban areas on the CCLS to the current participants who are located in rural Western New York. It would also be intriguing to interview teachers of the same grade level from various schools to see what discoveries can be made about their perceptions and practices involving the CCLS. The findings also provoked further questions such as:

- 1) Would the results be the same if there were more participants?
- 2) Are the perceptions of the CCLS the same in other states?

3) What are the students' perceptions of the CCLS?

These questions inspire future research to draw conclusions to those questions.

One parent had mentioned in the interview that she was concerned for families who were less privileged than her family and how they have dealt with the CCLS. Future research could examine how the socioeconomic status of parents impacts their perceptions of the CCLS.

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Appendix A

Teacher Interview Guide

The purpose of my thesis paper is to explore and understand how parents and teachers perceive the Common Core Learning Standards.

Any information involved with this interview that could personally identify you or anyone mentioned will remain anonymous. This interview will be recorded so I can transcribe the conversation to reference while writing my paper. The recording will be deleted after it is transcribed.

-What grade level do you teach? K 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

-Does your school implement the Common Core? Y N

1. Tell me what you know about the Common Core Learning Standards.
2. Explain your views on the CCLS.
3. How do you think the Common Core compares with New York State's previous set of standards?
4. A survey revealed that 87% of surveyed teachers attended professional development regarding the implementation of the CCLS in 2014. Did you attend professional development about the Common Core Learning Standards in 2014? Tell me about it.
5. How has the Common Core impacted your teaching?
6. What are your thoughts on the availability of tools, materials, and resources in your school that are needed to teach the Common Core? (i.e. Do you have the right tools and materials needed to teach the CC?)
7. In what ways do you think the CCLS has impacted students?
8. How does the Common Core affect your ability to differentiate instruction?

9. What effect do you think the CCLS have had on parent involvement with their child's education?
10. Tell me about an experience you've had with the Common Core.
11. Is there anything else you'd like to add? Any feedback about the interview? (i.e. Any questions you thought I should've asked, but didn't?)
12. How do you think the CCLS will affect your students when they graduate high school?

Appendix B

Parent Interview Guide

The purpose of my thesis paper is to explore and understand how parents and teachers perceive the Common Core Learning Standards.

Any information involved with this interview that could personally identify you or anyone mentioned will remain anonymous. This interview will be recorded so I can transcribe the conversation to reference while writing my paper. The recording will be deleted after it is transcribed.

What grade is your child in? K 1 2 3 4 5 6

Does your child attend a rural public school in WNY that implements the Common Core? Y/N

1. Tell me what you know about the Common Core?
2. Tell me about how you learned about the Common Core?
3. Discuss how your child's school has informed you about the Common Core.
4. Describe an experience regarding the Common Core you feel affected your child.
- 5.. Do you find the Common Core affects how you help your child do homework?
6. If the Common Core was eliminated, what do you think the outcome would be?
7. Think about your education as a child. Tell me about how you think your child's experiences with the Common Core have impacted their learning.
8. Tell me about the communication between you and your child's teacher about the Common Core?
9. Is there anything else you'd like to add? Any feedback about the interview? (i.e. Any questions you thought I should've asked, but didn't?)
10. How do you think the CCLS will affect your child when they graduate high school?