University of Nevada, Reno

Teaching Under the Policy Cascades: Common Core, Learned Dependency, and Literacy Instruction

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Literacy Studies

by

Aimee L. Papola

Dr. Julie L. Pennington/Dissertation Advisor

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We recommend that the dissertation
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AIMEE L. PAPOLA

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Julie Pennington, Ph.D. , Advisor

Cynthia Brock, Ph.D., Committee Member

Donald Bear, Ph.D., Committee Member

Dianna Townsend, Ed.D., Committee Member

Livia D'Andrea, Graduate School Representative

Marsha H. Read, Ph. D., Dean, Graduate School

May, 2012

Abstract

Educational policies and initiatives continually influence the instruction in classrooms across the nation. At the time of this study, the Common Core State Standards Initiative was in its first full year of implementation in schools across the country. Using ethnographic methods (Foley, 1990; Heath, 1983; McLaren, 1986) and a critical theory perspective (Apple, 1999; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005), this study examined how elementary teachers planned and implemented literacy instruction in their classroom while balancing the numerous policies and initiatives related to education.

Six teachers participated in the study. Over three months, data was collected in the form of fieldnotes on observation of instruction, interviews with teachers, and physical artifacts. Each teacher was observed for sixty minutes once a week and participated in a thirty to forty minute debriefing interview weekly. Data analysis consisted of ongoing and repeated coding for patterns and themes related to the literacy planning and instruction for each individual teacher, as well as themes that were common across teachers.

Findings from the data analysis indicated a significant reliance of teachers on outside factors for planning and instruction in literacy, with a particular focus on the Common Core State Standards Initiative. The teachers' own professional knowledge base was eroded in the process of policy cascades, and as a result, the teachers developed a learned dependency on outside influence for instructional decision making in literacy.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to Darby,

for always knowing when I needed laughter, encouragement, or love

every day of this process,

and to my parents,

for a lifetime of love and support.

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Chapter One: Introduction to the Study

Literacy instruction has been high on the agenda of federal, state, and local policies in education for more than a decade. Beginning with the implementation of the No Child Let Behind Act of 2001 (US Department of Education, 2002), school districts across the United States have been shaping their literacy instruction and curriculum based on decisions made in the nation's capital (Allen, et al., 2007; Koppich & Esch, 2012; Suskind, 2007). Educational policies affect schools and teachers in significant ways, changing the educational landscape of the classroom and impacting students across the states. The purpose of this study is to investigate how teachers plan and implement literacy instruction in their classroom while existing under the power of these educational policies. In the following sections, the history of reading instruction in the United States, with particular focus on the historical, political, and social context that impacts the nature of literacy instruction in schools, will be presented, as well as a brief history of policy in literacy education. The literature will provide a background leading to the construction of the most recent initiative--the Common Core State Standards Initiative (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010)--which is a central focus of the current study. The chapter will conclude with the research questions and an overview of the remaining chapters.

Historical, Political, and Social Context of Literacy Education

Literacy is embedded in historical, social, cultural, and political structures. Both literacy and schooling can, and should, be examined through a historical, political, and social lens to determine why certain ideologies were dominant at different times

throughout history. According to Gee (2000), reading and writing only make sense if they are examined within the context of the social, cultural, historical, political, and economic practices of which they are a part. Policy related to literacy instruction is also socially constructed at a particular point in history and is subject to social, economic, and political influences that govern a specific time (Edmondson, 2004). Education is not isolated from the larger society; rather, it is shaped by it and embedded within it (Apple, 1999).

When teachers enter their classrooms, they are constrained to varying degrees by factors of history and politics (Sprague, 1992). In other words, the act of teaching is implanted within the social climate of the current times. These political and cultural influences lead to a "hidden curriculum" in the nation's classrooms (Apple, 1979; Giroux, 1980; McLaren, 1989). The hidden curriculum involves the tacit teaching of norms, values, and dispositions to students and occurs simply by their living in and complying with the expectations of schools on a daily basis (Apple, 1979). This curriculum functions to favor the ideologies of the dominant group of policymakers and federal government. Core reading programs, curriculum, materials, and policies in schooling come with a set of what is considered "acceptable knowledge", and this is reproduced and offered to students as "fact", despite racial, gender, and class inequalities, as well as marginalization of non-dominant groups (Apple, 1992; Giroux, 1980). Some critical scholars (Apple, 1990; McLaren, 1989) contend that schools function to reproduce social structures, like class systems, within our schools, or that part of the purpose of the school day is preparing children for the culture of a workplace (LeCompte, 1978). According to the United States Department of Education, the mission of the

federal government has been, and continues to be, "to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access" (US Department of Education, 2012). Using that perspective, this would theoretically lead to the near disappearance of issues like low student achievement, unemployment, and international economic competitiveness (Luke, 1988). All of these factors that stem from the current economic and political situations narrow the ways that teachers make decisions in their classrooms.

The constructed knowledge, social practices, and political concerns that exist within a historical context all contribute to forming the dominant ideology of the time (Giroux, 1988). By viewing literacy instruction through the dominant ideology, it becomes possible to better understand how the education systems in the United States determine what knowledge is deemed as important for schools, and how that knowledge will be shared in classrooms. In the next section, the ways in which these dominant ideologies at different times in history shaped literacy instruction and policy in our nation will be illustrated.

A Brief History of Literacy Instruction and Policy in the United States

Throughout history, many ideas about literacy and literacy education reflected the ideologies of the times in which they existed (Edmondson, 2004). The issues that were important politically and socially throughout the country—and the world—influenced what was emphasized within the nation's schools. (Kallus & Ratliff, 2011; Pasco, 2003; Resnick & Resnick, 1985). In this section, an outline of some of the history of literacy

instruction, including the introduction and development of educational policies that shape schooling in the United States, will be presented.

Historically, schooling has always existed in order to serve the interests of the state or nation, whether it was religiously motivated or politically driven. In the 1600s, laws in colonial America were in place requiring children to be able to read the Scriptures, and religion was the main purpose for learning to read (Keller-Cohen, 1993). During this period, the main instructional materials for literacy instruction in the United States tended to be hornbooks, primers, and passages from the Bible (Smith, 2002). The laws at this time also sometimes included civil purposes for literacy. For example, a Massachusetts law in 1642 stated the goal of learning to read was being able to read and understand principles of religion, as well as to understand the laws of the country (Keller-Cohen, 1993). During the 1700s and 1800s there was an increasing emphasis on nationalistic aims and moral concerns within reading materials and instruction (Martinez & McGee, 2000). Additionally, literacy at this time was often a privilege, with instruction occurring based on gender, ethnicity, race, and social status (Kallus & Ratliff, 2011). This is, again, a reflection of the political and social context at that time in the nation's history. The appearance of a connection between the government and education also began during this period. Originally, the Department of Education was formed in 1867 for the purpose of collecting information on schools and teaching to help establish effective school systems throughout the states. This original intent to gather information on "what works" has remained a central focus for policymakers even to the present day (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

In the late 1800s to the early 1900s, the United States began to move away from heavy reliance on farming and small scale industry, which created a need for skilled workers in other fields. There was a large increase in demand for people who were competent in managerial and supervisory positions (Resnick & Resnick, 1985). This shift of focus in the nation's job market created a need for change in the school curriculum. This change also accompanied the introduction of standardized tests throughout the nation, as more students were returning from the fields and entering classrooms. Intelligence and aptitude tests, which were used widely in the Army by the time of World War I, were one of the first types of mass testing to be utilized to determine what the nation's schoolchildren knew (Resnick & Resnick, 1985). When World War II began, tests were administered to United States Army recruits, which apparently indicated alarming rates of "functional illiteracy". This led educators and policymakers to conclude that the effort to achieve widespread literacy through compulsory schooling was not enough to increase the literacy rate in the country (Luke, 1988).

Schooling in the United States, with a particular focus on reading and writing, began to come under scrutiny by the government and the general public. As a result of a stronger examination of literacy instruction in schools, professional books about reading instruction began to emerge (Shannon, 1987). However, this introduction of materials for teachers often did not include teacher manuals, workbooks, and tests until the 1920s. Prior to the development of those materials, the teachers were responsible for making instructional decisions, creating goals for students, and deciding how to evaluate student

achievement (Shannon, 1987). With the 1920s came a shift in reading instruction from heavy reliance on oral recitation and memorization to more emphasis on silent reading and comprehension. Additionally, basals entered classrooms with a blend of whole word and phonics lessons (Allington, 1984). In the 1950s, Flesch (1955) published *Why Johnny Can't Read*, which contained the basic message that teachers did not put enough emphasis on phonics instruction. Flesch asserted this was the reason so many students were not learning to read. This publication was a significant factor in leading to what became known as "The Great Debate" in reading instruction, which was essentially an argument in the literacy community regarding whole language versus phonics instruction. The whole language approach, which has roots in the child-centered philosophy of Dewey, strongly emerged as a movement in the 1980s, challenging the significant use of basals and heavy phonics instruction (Pearson, 1984). This movement created dramatic changes to basals in the early 1990s, with the inclusion of more writing and deeper questioning. By the end of the 1990s, however, the pendulum began to swing again in the direction of more skills-based instruction in literacy.

In addition to commentaries like the one written by Flesch, the political and social context of the later part of the 1900s was influencing changes in the schools. In 1957, the launch of the Russian space satellite, Sputnik, increased demands for a more academically challenging curriculum for schools in the United States in order to maintain global competitiveness (Resnick & Resnick, 1985; Suskind, 2007). Educational reform really began to rise during the 1980s. In 1983, the document *A Nation at Risk* (US Department of Education, 1983) was published as a call for the educational system to

reform. The concern was that “our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world”. The authors continued to point fingers at the educational institutions in the United States, accusing them of losing sight of the basic purpose of schooling and the high expectations that were necessary to achieve these purposes. The report also made several recommendations, including a tougher set of basic academic requirements for high school graduation, higher standards in place for universities, a longer school year and/or school day, and merit pay for top teachers. This document was a major landmark in the world of educational reform, bringing more public attention to the apparent public school crisis.

Once studies began to emerge that unfavorably compared the achievement of students in the United States to other countries, American stakeholders in education began demanding changes in policies, educational practices, and standards for teachers and for learning (Pasco, 2003). Initially, the resulting educational reforms had the intent to increase authority in the states for setting goals and standards for accountability (Bales, 2006). Despite this intent, the federal government became more intensely involved in education during the 1990s (Chatterji, 2002). The standards-based reform movement began to develop more strongly in the 1990s, which called for higher standards for all students (Swanson & Stevenson, 2002). However, according to Au & Valencia (2010), the anticipation of gains in students’ literacy achievement through the implementation of rigorous standards and high states testing has failed to develop. Therefore, education reform continued to dominate the schooling systems into the 21st century.

Educational Policy in the 21st Century

From the beginning of the 21st century to the present, the federal government's role in education policy has become more pronounced (Koppich & Esch, 2012). Since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (US Department of Education, 2002), the federal government has taken a more visible and prominent role in classrooms across the country than ever before. In fact, the No Child Left Behind Act is often regarded as an unprecedented entry by the government into affairs of public education that was once left to states and school districts (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006). The act was based on four basic principles: "stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work" (US Department of Education, 2002). No Child Left Behind (NCLB) resulted in an increased emphasis on high-stakes performance assessments, measures to determine whether schools were making adequate yearly progress, and consequences for schools who were not making that progress. Additionally, school districts were required under NCLB to have in place "scientifically based research" programs as part of their curriculum. The United States Department of Education (2002) defines this as programs that used:

> Experimental or quasi-experimental designs in which individuals, entities, programs, or activities are assigned to different conditions and with appropriate controls to evaluate the effects of the condition of interest, with a preference for random-assignment experiments, or other designs to the extent that those designs contain within-condition or across-condition controls. (p. 541)

While these research designs may give quality information about a specific program, they cannot answer all types of research questions. This requirement of programs defined in this manner privileges certain types of research over others, leading to more control over what is taught in classrooms.

Related initiatives under NCLB, such as Reading First, have specifically focused on literacy instruction and have dominated and shaped many districts' literacy goals for years (US Department of Education, 2009). According to Reading First, this program "focuses on putting proven methods of early reading instruction in classrooms." The initiative provided funding to assist school districts in the implementation of scientifically based reading research programs to ensure that children learned to read well by the end of third grade. Schools that did not comply with the requirements laid out by Reading First were ineligible to receive funding. The privileging of certain programs over others continued to decrease the amount of power that teachers had to make decisions about their classrooms.

Funding based initiatives in literacy education have continued to be put into place. More recent federal initiatives, such as Race to the Top and Striving Readers (US Department of Education, 2011), provide grants to schools that adhere to set guidelines and requirements. Race to the Top also required schools to agree to the adoption of a set of common nationwide standards. While the adoption of the standards was voluntary by state, states became ineligible for the available grants if they did not put the common set of standards into place (US Department of Education, 2010). These standards, known as

the Common Core State Standards, are now informing the instructional decision-making in 45 states across the country.

Current State of Literacy Education

Educational reform in the current decade is shaped by increasing concerns nationwide over the country's economic situation, increased unemployment rate, and political affairs worldwide. There is a growing concern that the United States will be unable to compete internationally because of perceived notions that children's achievement test scores continue to drop (Apple, 1999; Eisner, 1993; Jackson, 2012; Lopez, 2010; Miskel & Song, 2004; Pasco, 2003). A report from 2011 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) indicates that the average fourth grade score in reading remained unchanged from 2009, and in eighth grade, the average score in 2011 was one point higher than in 2009 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). Despite these results, education reforms continue to focus on preparing schoolchildren to perform at a globally acceptable level (Jackson, 2012).

According to Apple (1999), public fears about the job market, illiteracy rates, and reduction of family values always have an impact on education, and some policy reforms that aim to create "better workers" build on these fears. According to Giroux (2001), these types of social and economic conditions typically result in progressive critiques of the education system. Critical scholars examine ways that the school curriculum, knowledge that is included in instruction, and policies that are created depend on the current economic situation (McLaren, 1989). Teachers work in multiple intersecting contexts at once--including national, state, district, and school context--that impact their

work and even their beliefs (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1993). Therefore, it is essential to critically examine the impact of these policies and other social, political, and historical factors on the nation's educators.

Purpose of Study

Decisions about educational policies, as well as the way literacy instruction should look in schools, have a long history of being constructed based on the dominant ideologies in the nation. Literacy teachers have to make decisions about their instruction while operating within the guidelines of policies and systems of power that exist between the government and the teacher's own knowledge and belief system. The purpose of this ethnographic study is to explore the question: How do elementary teachers plan and implement literacy instruction? There is a particular focus on how teachers are able to do so within the current power structures and educational policies. In the following chapter, a review of literature will be shared with a more detailed overview on current initiatives in education, specifically focusing on the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Next, literature focused on the impact of policy in schools, as well as literature related to potential influences on teachers' planning and instruction in literacy, will be presented. The chapter will conclude with an outline of the theoretical lens used for this study, which is critical theory related to education. In the chapters that follow, the methodology used in this study, including data collection and analysis methods, will be presented. Chapter four will focus on the data that was collected throughout the study, and data interpretations and contributions to the field will be highlighted in the final chapter.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

This chapter begins with an overview of critical theory, the theoretical framework for this study, and how it was utilized to investigate the research question, how do teachers plan and implement literacy instruction? Next, a review of the existing literature on various factors that might influence a teacher's reading instruction will be shared. Following that, literature related to literacy instruction will be presented.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Theory

Due to the relationship between educational policy and literacy instruction, a system of power structures exists between policymakers and classroom teachers. Critical theory involves the marginalization and privileging of various groups in society (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1997; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Popkewitz, 1999). It also includes the belief that all thought is mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constructed (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011). Within the current state of literacy education, critical theory can be utilized as a means through which to question the dominance of the policymakers in power to make decisions about literacy instruction in schools, while other groups, such as literacy teachers responsible for the instruction of children, are often silenced (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Critical theory can also be used to question hidden assumptions, dominant ideologies, and power relations that exist in all aspects of society, especially literacy curriculum and pedagogy in schools (Apple, 1999; Bronner, 2011; Giroux, 2001; Kellner, 2003; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Popkewitz, 1999; Rasmussen, 1996). Finally, critical theory involves the notion that the oppression which characterizes certain

groups is often reproduced when the perceived subordinates accept their position as natural, necessary, or inevitable (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011). While the theory can be interpreted differently among theorists, several tenets serve as foundations to a critical theory of education.

Critical theory in education: Issues of power. Critical theorists recognize that there are many forms in which power exists (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). Critical theorists of education focus on the issues of power within schools, and are concerned with issues like politics in curriculum, as well as who maintains the power in decision-making related to education (Apple, 1999). According to Delpit (1993), there are various aspects of power related to education. One is that issues of power are always being enacted in classrooms, through power of the teacher over the students, power of textbook publishers to determine the knowledge presented, and the power of the state to enforce issues such as standards and compulsory schooling. This is evident in literacy policies like Race to the Top, Reading First, and Striving Readers, where the creators of policy exert their power over literacy teachers through mandating common standards or use of certain types of commercial reading programs (US Department of Education, 2009; 2011). Another aspect is that those with the power are often unaware of or unwilling to acknowledge that the power relations exist, but those without power are often very aware of the existence. Studies show that literacy teachers are often very cognizant of the power that is exerted upon them by policymakers when making instructional decisions regarding literacy pedagogy and materials (Allington & Pearson, 2011; Assaf, 2006; Bomer, 2005; Jordan, 2005; Maniates & Mahiri, 2011; Stillman & Anderson, 2011; Valli

& Chambliss, 2007; Wollman, 2007). According to Freire (1970), "Leaders who do not act dialogically, but insist on imposing their decisions, do not organize the people--they manipulate them. They do not liberate, nor are they liberated: they oppress" (p. 179). From a critical perspective, the leaders, in this case policymakers or district administration, who use their power to dictate decisions regarding literacy instruction do exactly this---manipulate or oppress the literacy teachers responsible for instruction.

Critical theory in education: Dominant ideologies. Another major tenet of critical theory, particularly in relation to education, is the questioning of dominant ideologies. Dominant ideologies are often what are accepted as truth or knowledge in classrooms across the world (Apple, 1999). The federal policies related to literacy instruction deem scientifically based reading research, typically defined through commercial reading programs, as more valuable over other types of research, and in turn, what becomes valid knowledge is determined by the scripted reading program and teacher manual (Jordan, 2005; Pennington, 2007). According to Apple (1979), a teacher's values and beliefs are evident in classroom expectations, routines, and choices of curriculum and materials as early as kindergarten. However, when literacy policy marginalizes the beliefs and values of literacy teachers through mandated curriculum and instructional approaches, the literacy teachers become oppressed by the dominant ideologies held by the government and policymakers. Critical theory can be a tool for uncovering this oppression and providing the means for literacy teachers to gain more power and have their voices heard (Freire, 1970; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; Morrell, 2009).

Critical theory in education: Hegemony. Antonio Gramsci formulated the concept of hegemony, another key element to educational critical theory (Hill, 2009). Hegemony refers to a social situation in which all aspects of social reality are dominated by a certain class. It is the "maintenance of domination not by sheer exercise of force but primarily through consensual social practices, social forms, and social structures produced in specific sites such as the state, school, political system, and mass media", (McLaren, 1989, p. 173). Hegemony is the process by which the powerful, like the federal government, win the consent of those who are oppressed—for example, literacy teachers-- by the oppressed groups unknowingly participating in their own oppression. According to Apple (1979), hegemony acts on our consciousness so that the educational and social world we interact with becomes the "only world". The potentially hegemonic nature of policy implementation can lead teachers to perceived autonomy in their positions. Leiter (1981) stated that unless teachers truly understand the organizational control system in schools, they might not perceive their freedom as constrained, even if they have limited decision-making. Literacy teachers may unknowingly participate in their own oppression if they are unaware of the ways in which policymakers' ideologies and local administrative interpretations of those policies dominate what they teach and how they teach it.

A critical theory of education examines issues of power, questions dominant ideologies, and challenges hegemonic power structures used in schools. These issues can impact teachers in many ways in relation to the literacy instruction in their classroom. The following section presents factors that may influence a teacher's planning and

instruction in literacy, including policy, high-stakes assessment, commercial reading programs, and professional knowledge base. Details will also be shared regarding the newest initiative currently impacting literacy instruction in the majority of the nation's schools—the Common Core State Standards Initiative (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). Finally, the chapter will close with a review of literature on reading instruction as it relates to the Common Core instructional shifts that are used by the teachers in the current study.

Influences on Literacy Planning and Instruction

Several factors influence the way a teacher plans his or her literacy instruction, as well as how he or she implements those lessons. Policy, both federal and local, can play a significant role in what occurs in classrooms. The standardized tests associated with policy can also strongly impact a teacher's educational practice. Additionally, some teachers' planning and instruction may be affected by mandated use of and strict fidelity to a commercial reading program. Finally, a teacher's professional knowledge base also may have an influence on what occurs in a literacy classroom. The following section begins with a review of literature on each of these influences affecting teachers' planning and classroom instruction in literacy.

Impact of policy on planning and instruction. Over the last two decades, federal and state governments have become significantly more involved in dictating what and how to teach in the nation's schools (Allington, 2002; Fang, Fu, & Lamme, 2004). Often it falls on individual school districts to determine exactly how those policies will be carried out at the local level. Research shows that the district administration can have a

significant impact on how policy is both interpreted and implemented within its schools, as well as on the teachers' beliefs and practices within those schools (Grossman & Thompson, 2004; Knapp, Shields, & Padilla, 1995; Palmer & Rangel, 2010).

Several studies have examined the impact policy has on instruction and on shaping teachers' beliefs (Achinstein, Ogawa, and Speiglman, 2004; Coburn, 2001; Grossman & Thompson, 2004; Palmer & Rangel, 2010). In a study on the role that the school district played in policy implementation, Grossman and Thompson (2004) followed ten teachers from their final year of teacher education into their first three years of teaching. The authors interviewed the teachers several times over the period of four years, as well as observed them three times a year in their classrooms. They found that the district's policy implementation had a significant impact on the teachers' instructional approaches and beliefs and shaped the decisions and concerns of the teachers. In the case of this particular study, the district's interpretation of policy acted as a lens through which these new teachers made decisions, formed concerns about instruction, and took action in their classrooms. In an ethnographic study conducted by Palmer and Rangel (2010), the authors used interviewing of third and fifth grade teachers at six school sites in an attempt to understand how the teachers made sense of policy mandates in their classrooms. They found that the teachers expressed both explicit and implicit pressures from the district and their school site regarding test scores related to policies. Despite efforts to counteract the pressures by using teaching strategies they felt were best for their students, the teachers found it challenging to include those strategies within the course of a school day that was filled with test-centered teaching materials and pedagogy. Coburn

(2001) conducted a case study examining teachers in a school in California. She looked at how the teachers were able to construct and co-construct various messages received from policy regarding literacy instruction. Coburn found that new teachers were especially prone to adopting the messages embedded within the policies regarding specific instructional practices. Additionally, the policies that were tied to assessments had a significantly powerful impact on the teachers' practices in the classroom. Achinstein, Ogawa, and Speiglman (2004) studied the experiences of twenty new teachers to explore how state policies, local conditions, and the characteristics of individual teachers created separate "tracks" of teachers. Over two years, the authors focused more specifically on two of the teachers by collecting interviews, observations, and policy related documents. They found that the two teachers developed their professional identities in very different school cultures, based on their participation in professional development, how policy was implemented, and the level of autonomy they had in the classroom. The authors believed these kinds of conditions would create inequities in the teaching field, impacting students as a result. These studies all suggest that the ways in which districts interpret and implement policy into practice can have a significant impact on the literacy instruction that takes place in a classroom, as well as the teacher's own professional beliefs.

Policy implementation can allow for some degree of teacher empowerment, if school districts approach the process with this intent in mind. Short (1994) described empowerment as a process during which educators build competence to take charge of their own professional growth and to solve their own problems in order to have skills and knowledge necessary to act on various situations and improve them when necessary.

Empowerment typically relates to how involved teachers feel in making decisions that directly impact their classroom and their work. Fang, Fu, and Lamme (2004) established a summer institute inviting teachers to read professional books and articles, as well as to view videos, and individually reflect on these materials. Following that, the teachers met monthly with a local university faculty member to reflect and collaborate together on the previously read materials. The authors found that the teachers expressed higher feelings of empowerment and began making decisions based on the students' needs, rather than the scripted materials or district curriculum.

Advocates of educational policies specifying standards, curriculum, and pedagogy argue that the policies provide teachers with greater clarity on what and how to teach, therefore leading to higher quality instruction and increased student achievement (Achinstein, Ogawa, & Speiglman, 2004). However, critics insist that some of these policies narrow teachers' professional judgment, discourage effective instruction based on the needs of the students, and focus too much on assessment preparation (Darling-Hammond, 1997; McNeil, 2000). Some reform policies carry the assumption that knowledge related to teaching is universal, as well as generalizable across classrooms, without consideration of the significance of local context and culture. The implication that is created is that it is a teacher's job to be aware of this knowledge and implement it in the classroom with fidelity (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006).

Impact of high-stakes testing on planning and instruction. Standardized testing, and the pressure to perform on such tests, has existed in schools for many years. Since the implementation of No Child Left Behind (US Department of Education 2002),

the stakes have been raised in regard to these tests. Several literacy scholars and researchers have examined the ways in which high-stakes testing impacts literacy instruction in the classroom, and how the tests can change the role of the teacher (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1990; Linn, 2000; Miller, 2002; Miller, Callahan, Schroeder, & Hartman, 2001; Smith, 1991; Suskind, 2007; Valli & Chamblis, 2007). The national standards movement over the past decade has prompted many states to look at the use of test scores not only to hold students accountable for their achievement and progress, but also to hold teachers accountable to higher standards (Miller, 2002).

Several federal funding programs target the evaluation of literacy teachers and what counts as teacher quality in relation to student performance on assessments. There continues to be a greater emphasis placed on teacher accountability than on the development of teachers' pedagogical knowledge base (Maniates & Mahiri, 2011). The National Council on Teacher Quality reported that 21 states now require annual evaluations of all teachers, and 16 states require that student achievement be incorporated into teacher evaluations (US Department of Education, 2011). The Race to the Top fund also promotes the connection between student achievement on standardized tests and the evaluation process for teachers (US Department of Education, 2009). The high priority placed upon student achievement on standardized tests can have a significant impact on teachers' planning and instruction in the classroom. The reputations and jobs of many literacy teachers are on the line and determined by students' test scores, resulting in literacy teachers often feeling pressured to have students perform well on these tests. Therefore, many literacy teachers are willing to modify their curriculum in order to avoid

low test scores, despite feelings of guilt, disconnect to their teaching beliefs, or negative feelings towards the tests themselves (Afflerbach, 2004; Dooley & Assaf, 2009; Hoffman & Assaf, 2001; Pacheco, 2010; Pennington, 2007; Smith, 1991; Stillman & Anderson, 2011; Suskind, 2007; Valli & Chamblis, 2007).

Narrowing curriculum to focus on test preparation is a common consequence to increased high-stakes testing in schools (Au, 2007; Linn, 2000; Linn, Graue, & Sanders, 1990; Miller, Callahan, Schroeder, & Hartman, 2001; Smith, 1991). Miller, Callahan, Schroeder, and Hartman (2001), as well as Smith (1991), found that teachers in their studies began to focus almost completely on the preparation for these tests, with their teaching styles matching the way students would be assessed. Au (2007) synthesized the findings from 49 qualitative studies examining the impact of high-stakes testing on classrooms. “Teaching to the test” was a significant finding, as well as exclusion of untested items and content areas, both of which are ways that curriculum can be narrowed.

In addition to the curriculum in schools changing to be more focused on assessments, high-stakes testing can change the climate of schools overall. Groves (2002) studied a school in North Carolina that was very student-centered as a result of an arts-based reform initiative. Multiple intelligence style lessons incorporated dance, music, and art into regular classroom activities. Instruction throughout the school focused on cooperative projects with excited students and supportive, involved parents. However, the school did not make adequate progress on the standardized tests, resulting in the requirement of outside evaluations of the school and teachers. During the following

school year, the school changed dramatically, with the focus turning to performance on the test. The art-based activities were only offered in the primary grade classrooms that were not subject to the standardized testing. Teacher morale sank, community and parent support declined, and students expressed a lack of enjoyment coming to school. In this particular case, high stakes testing had a negative impact on the entire school climate.

The pressure to have students perform with high achievement on standardized tests can also impact a teacher's sense of professionalism. Smith (1991) conducted a qualitative study exploring teachers' perceptions of high-stakes testing. The author found that many teachers expressed feeling emotionally burdened by the tests and in some cases, teachers felt shamed by the publishing of low test scores. Teachers also expressed feeling guilty about the instructional time they spent on testing and the impact the tests seemed to have on the children. Assaf (2006) studied a reading specialist who reluctantly deserted her professional beliefs about teaching literacy, which came from years of experience and training, to succumb to the pressures of mandated curriculum and high-stakes testing. Her literacy instruction changed dramatically, going from rich discussions about high-quality, authentic literature to isolated test practice and repetitive skill drills. Often mandates resulting from policies like No Child Left Behind, including the high-stakes testing, leave teachers feeling like they have little to no decision-making power, and must therefore rely on outside experts to make curriculum and pedagogical decisions (Ohanian, 2007; Wollman, 2007). The result is many teachers losing sight of what true professionalism is and new teachers never having that sense of professionalism (Ohanian, 2007).

In the effort to increase student performance on standardized tests, many educational reforms do not heavily focus on supporting teachers in learning new instructional practices to implement in their class. Instead, the assumption is that the tests will be dictating much of what teachers do in the classroom (Miller, 2002). This could lead to teachers relying less and less on their own professional judgment and looking to more outside factors, such as scripted reading programs, to help make decisions about their literacy instruction.

Commercial reading programs. In the current climate of literacy education, with federal initiatives determining a majority of the policy that drives district curriculum throughout the United States, the approach to teaching reading that is often encouraged and emphasized is represented by commercial, scripted reading programs that contain goals, materials, and activities that are standardized for use in all classrooms (Dreher & Singer, 1989; Krevotics, 1985; Shannon, 1987). The adoption of commercial reading programs by school districts can sometimes control or limit literacy teachers' freedom in planning and instruction, depending upon how the programs are implemented and mandated, potentially diminishing the teachers' professional control over the goals and content of the curriculum (Apple, 1999; Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006; Baumann & Heubach, 1996; Shannon, 1987). In many schools, teachers turn to the adopted reading program—either by mandate or by choice—to determine most, if not all, of their literacy instruction.

Several studies have been conducted on the impact of commercial reading programs on teachers and instruction (Bomer, 2005; MacGillivray, Ardell, Curwen, &

Palma, 2004; Pease-Alvarez & Samway, 2008). If districts dictate the way the programs are used within classrooms, the programs sometimes force literacy teachers to relinquish control over curricular and pedagogical decisions about literacy instruction, which devalues the significance of their background knowledge and acquired teaching skills (Baumann & Heubach, 1996; Wollman, 2007). Some districts mandate exactly what page in what book literacy teachers should be at on a given day, taking almost all control and power away from literacy teachers (Allington & Pearson, 2011; Pease-Alvarez & Samway, 2008; Wollman, 2007). Bomer (2005) recounted her own experiences in leaving the teaching profession due to feelings of being deskilled through the mandated use of a commercial program, and knowing that her students' needs were not being met because of the particular mandated program in her district. She wrote about her frustrations over having to give up what she felt was high quality reading instruction in order to spend her days using required decodable texts, isolated skill drills, and constant assessment. MacGillivray, Ardell, Curwen, and Palma (2004) investigated teachers in southern California and their struggles with the enforcement of the commercial reading programs they were expected to use. The literacy teachers there reported being forced to follow a scripted reading program, despite their years of experience or advanced degrees, and stated that they felt "stripped of any opportunity to utilize their hard-earned literacy knowledge" (p. 137). Pease-Alvarez and Samway (2008) interviewed ten literacy teachers about the way their instruction changed due to federal mandates about curriculum and instruction. The participants reported that the scripted reading program dominated literacy instruction throughout most of the school day, and that they were unable to focus on students' needs because they were focused on the teacher manual. All

ten teachers reported feeling a loss of control over what and how they taught, and reported feelings of disrespect. While some commercial reading programs allow flexibility and professional judgment on the part of the teacher, others can leave the teachers feeling "deskilled" (Apple, 1999) if the use of these programs is not left up to their discretion.

While many literacy scholars would agree that these commercial programs are based on research involving best instruction in reading, the problem with this approach can be that it is unlikely a teacher will reach the needs of all students by simply implementing a script from a teacher manual (Valli & Chambliss, 2007). Buly and Valencia (2002) looked at the assessment results of students taking high-stakes literacy assessments to determine the cause of low test scores. After examining the data, the authors had concerns over the mandated instructional strategies that the scripted literacy curriculum contained, noting that predetermined pedagogical approaches could not meet the diverse needs of all students in a literacy class. Valli & Chambliss (2007) engaged in exploration of one literacy teacher's instruction in a reading intervention class using a mandated commercial reading intervention program, as well as the same teacher's core reading class with more freedom to choose pedagogical approaches to literacy instruction. The authors found the intervention class with the commercial program to have far less positive dialogue and meaningful interactions between the teacher and students, with more test-focused and skills-based instruction taking place. For example, in the class that was a general, core reading class, comprehension instruction took place through rich discussions, with students sharing their own personal connections and

reactions to the novels they read. Conversely, in the intervention class, comprehension instruction centered around the text publisher's multiple choice questions and questions that the grade level teachers wrote to mirror the kinds of questions students might be asked on state standardized tests. In another study, Jordan (2005) observed a lesson from a popular commercial reading program and witnessed children sitting through hours of repetitive lessons, where they responded to questions in unison and with speed, and were expected mainly to remain on task and not ask questions or share opinions. This type of reading instruction focuses on low-level reading skills, and requires little background knowledge on the part of the literacy teacher. Several studies reveal that scripted, prepackaged literacy curriculum may not always contribute to the improvement of reading achievement of struggling readers (Alvarez & Corn, 2008; McGill-Franzen, Zmach, Solic, & Zeig, 2006). Dewitz, Jones, and Leahy (2009) also found that skills and strategies related to reading comprehension in several popular commercial reading programs were taught in isolation and separated into components, rather than a unitary concept, which is not suggested to be best practice for literacy learning. While the comprehension strategies indicated in a commercial program may be rooted in research, they can also be limiting in a classroom and may not be effective for all students. With a heavy script in a commercial program, and district protocol to follow those programs with fidelity, the pedagogical content knowledge of some teachers becomes reliant only on the strategies in the teacher manual and the pacing guide of a school district.

With increased pressures on teachers stemming from national reform efforts, policies on teacher evaluation tied to student achievement, and adoption of required core

reading programs, literacy teachers face a myriad of outside influences on what occurs daily in their classroom. Literacy teachers also bring with them to the classroom their own beliefs about teaching literacy, knowledge of instructional methods and curricular materials, professional experiences in the classroom and from professional development, and ideologies about literacy and instruction.

Professional knowledge base. Research suggests that teacher expertise is one of the most important factors in determining student achievement (Allington, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Koppich & Esch, 2012). This expertise is part of a teacher's knowledge base, which can be a large part of the way he or she decides to implement literacy instruction within the classroom.

Knowledge base can be defined in a variety of ways. According to Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999), knowledge base is often thought of as the general theories and research-based findings on a variety of educational topics that teachers need to know in order to teach effectively. For the purpose of this paper, knowledge base is defined through the work of Shulman (1987), who stated that the knowledge base of teachers needs to include an assortment of categories and sources, including content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, curriculum knowledge, and strategic knowledge.

The content knowledge of a teacher is essentially the "knowledge, understanding, skill, and disposition that are to be learned by school children" (Shulman, 1987, p. 8-9). It involves all the theories and information related to a teacher's subject area. This part of a teacher's knowledge base stems from the literature and research that exist in a teacher's content area. Teachers must have a deep understanding of the subject matter in their field

in order to help others learn the information. As Shulman (1986) explained, the teacher "need not only understand *that* something is so; the teacher must further understand *why* it is so" (p. 9). In literacy, this could include anything from the essential components of literacy instruction and developmental stages of reading acquisition, to standards and assessments available in reading and writing. A thorough understanding and extensive knowledge of the subject matter one teaches is an essential part to a teacher's professional knowledge base.

Shulman (1987) defined pedagogical content knowledge as the merging of content and pedagogy into a thorough understanding of how certain topics or issues are represented and adapted to the diverse needs and interests of students, and are in turn presented for instruction. Pedagogical content knowledge is a teacher's understanding of how to help others learn the content knowledge in a particular area. In other words, it is "the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others" (Shulman, 1986, p. 9). This part of a teacher's knowledge base is more than just knowing a wide range of instructional strategies—it is also knowing which pedagogical approach is best to use in various contexts with different types of learners.

Curriculum knowledge, according to Shulman (1986), involves knowing that the curriculum is represented by a wide range of programs and materials designed for teaching specific subjects and topics at certain levels. For a literacy teacher, this part of a knowledge base involves thorough understanding of any mandated programs, as well as additional books, media, and programs that are available to teach a wide range of learners. With curriculum knowledge, teachers can examine the learning objectives they

have for students and make decisions regarding which materials would be most effective in helping students learn the content presented and accomplish the intended objectives.

Finally, the strategic knowledge part of a teacher's knowledge base is when teachers "extend understanding beyond principle to the wisdom of practice" (Shulman, 1986, p. 13). When a teacher is using his or her strategic knowledge, a reflection takes place not just on how to teach something, but also why it is best taught in that manner. Strategic knowledge involves changing instruction in the moment based on the situation that presents itself. Strategic knowledge bridges the "wisdom of practice" that comes from experience in a classroom with the current research in a teacher's field in order to use professional judgment to make decisions about instruction.

A teacher's knowledge base is connected to the stance he or she takes toward knowledge in general, its relationship to instructional practices, and the overall purposes of schooling (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2001). Teachers can use their own professional judgment and wealth of knowledge to interpret research, critically implement policy, and theorize their practices in literacy instruction.

Educational policy, high stakes testing, commercial reading programs, and a teacher's professional knowledge base are all potential influences on the ways that teachers make decisions regarding the planning and implementation of literacy instruction. Currently, the Common Core State Standards Initiative is possibly the most influential reform teachers have ever encountered (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehmen, 2012). This initiative is a key component of the current study, and will be presented in detail in the following section.

Common Core State Standards Initiative

Standards-based educational reform is essentially founded on the notion that new high standards curricula and recommended instructional techniques will have the greatest impact on classrooms (Swanson & Stevenson, 2002). The Common Core Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) are intended to provide common and appropriate benchmarks for all students, no matter where they live. According to the document, the standards are:

> The culmination of an extended, broad-based effort to fulfill the charge issued by the states to create the next generation of K–12 standards in order to help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school. (p.3)

According to the Common Core Standards document, the new standards build on the foundation that was laid by the states in creating high-quality educational standards, as well as draw on important international models, research, and input from departments of education, scholars, professional organizations, educators, parents, and students. The authors of the document state that the new standards represent "the best elements of standards-related work to date and an important advance over that previous work". (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p.3). However strong the Common Core proclaims their standards to be, critics posit that standards-based reforms such as these dictate the literacy learning objectives for all students without differentiation of individual needs and interests (Jordan, 2005; Mac-Gillivray, Ardell, Curwen, & Palma, 2004; Wollman, 2007). The

national standards also take some control away from teachers in deciding what should be taught in their literacy classrooms (“Focus should be on teachers in common core initiative”, 2009).

A common argument for the need for standards is that students cannot succeed in meeting the demands of the economy if they cannot be successful with more challenging work in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, 2004). The authors of the Common Core Standards provided several reasons that these new standards are necessary in our schools. The authors stated that they want all students, regardless of where they live, to be prepared for college and the workforce, and the Common Core Standards are intended as the way to help ensure this (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Within the introductory section of the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts, there is a page devoted to what the Standards do not cover (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 6). One item states, “While the Standards focus on what is most essential, they do not describe all that can or should be taught. A great deal is left to the discretion of teachers and curriculum developers.” The states are asked to utilize Common Core for 85% of their standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics, with the remaining 15% coming from their own state standards (ASCD, n.d.). Additionally, within the Common Core standards document there is an explicit statement that the standards define what students are expected to know, not how teachers should

teach. The intent is for pedagogical decisions to be left in the hands of schools and classroom teachers.

While the Common Core made the above statement about not dictating how teachers should teach the new content, there are still strong suggestions being made to teachers around the country from some of the Common Core's authors (Student Achievement Partners, n.d.). Organizations like Student Achievement Partners have created documents and videos on "exemplary lessons" available to teachers and are being touted as recommendations from the Common Core. However, these videos are not part of policy at the federal level, nor are they mentioned in the actual Common Core State Standards document. These videos and other resources that teachers are being encouraged to use seem to suggest not just *what* to teach, but also *how* to teach it.

Student Achievement Partners. Student Achievement Partners is an organization that "assembles leading thinkers and researchers to design actions to substantially improve student achievement" (Student Achievement Partners, n.d.). The organization is now being promoted as playing a large role in the development of the Common Core Standards, and they asserted that the standards were based on the best available evidence of what students need to know to be ready for the demands of college and the workplace. A strong component of the evidence used by the authors of Common Core in creating the standards document involved reports from the American College Testing Program (ACT) that suggested the need for students to spend more instructional time with complex texts (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). This notion involving text complexity is

now a key component of the Common Core Standards. The role of Student Achievement Partners now, according to the organization's website, is to support teachers in the implementation of the Common Core.

One of the founding partners of Student Achievement Partners who is now recognized as one of the leading authors of the Common Core Standards is David Coleman (Student Achievement Partners, n.d.). Coleman's work prior to the Common Core Initiative focused on health care, financial institutions, and assessment development. His involvement with the Common Core Standards became more public after the release of the standards, with videos of his "exemplar lessons" shown to teachers in several states (PARCC, 2011). In the video that is being shown to school districts in several states (as well as within the district examined in this study), Coleman shares his interpretation of what lessons aligned to the Common Core should involve.

Coleman, Student Achievement Partners, and other organizations such as "The Common Core Institute" (The Common Core Institute, 2011) encourage viewing the standards through what they call "instructional shifts", which are embedded within the standards, though not clearly defined in the official document. The lead authors of the Common Core identified the shifts as a way for teachers to approach instruction that would be aligned to the Common Core. Coleman and fellow co-author, Susan Pimentel, used these shifts in criteria for publishers in creating materials that are aligned with the new standards. They stated, "By underscoring what matters most in the standards, the criteria illustrate what shifts should take place in the next generation of curricula, including paring away elements that distract or are at odds with the standards" (Coleman

& Pimentel, 2011, p. 1). Some of the shifts are emphasized over others, and districts or schools might elect to focus on one or more of the shifts.

Instructional shifts of the Common Core. The lead authors of the Common Core identified the instructional shifts, which led to organizations and individual states creating resources for teachers to better understand these shifts. One of the resources used by the district in this study is a site called EngageNY, which was developed by a group of educators from the state of New York that work closely with other individuals and organizations, including Common Core co-author, David Coleman. The site lists the six instructional shifts in English Language Arts (EngageNY, 2011). These are:

-Balancing informational and literary texts

-Knowledge in the disciplines

-Staircase of complexity

-Text-based answers

-Writing from sources

-Academic vocabulary

Each of these instructional shifts is emphasized to varying degrees in school districts and by various organizations like Student Achievement Partners and the Common Core Institute.

Shift one: Balancing informational and literary texts. The first instructional

shift asks teachers, beginning in the kindergarten, to include an increase of nonfiction materials in their classrooms to achieve a balance of literary and informational texts (Coleman & Pimentel, 2011). By reading a mix of classic and contemporary literature, as well as complex informational texts, students are expected to broaden their knowledge and perspective on a variety of subjects (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). By grade four, students are expected to encounter 50% informational, 50% literary text in their classroom (The Common Core Institute, 2011). This amount increases as the students progress in grades, with the balance shifting to a heavier use of informational text.

Shift two: Knowledge in the disciplines. The second instructional shift in the Common Core deals with integration of literacy standards in the content areas. The shift asks content area teachers to emphasize literacy activities within their planning and instruction so students can learn through domain specific texts (EngageNY, 2011). The introduction to the Common Core Standards in English Language Arts also addresses this shift, stating, "The Standards insist that instruction in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language be a shared responsibility within the school" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 4). The reason for this is said to be for students to be able to independently read and understand complex informational text in multiple content areas.

Shift three: Staircase of complexity. The third shift on text complexity focuses on preparing students for the challenge of college and career ready texts, with each grade level requiring a "step" of growth on the "staircase". Students are expected to read the grade appropriate text around which instruction is focused (EngageNY, 2011). Within

the Common Core Standards, this concept is expanded upon in greater detail in Appendix A (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). This appendix to the Common Core Standards contains levels of text at various grade levels that are aligned with expectations of the Common Core standards. The reason for emphasizing complexity of text with the Common Core is that by the time students graduate, they need to be able to read and comprehend independently the complex texts that are commonly found in college and careers (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices &Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, Appendix A).

Shift four: Text-based answers. The first Anchor Standard in reading in the Common Core is worded: "Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 10). This close reading and emphasis on what the text says is a concept echoed in the shifts, as well as in the previously mentioned videos of lessons by leading authors of the Common Core (PARCC, 2011). The Student Achievement Partners organization encourages a focus on identifying and creating text-dependent questions as a first step in implementing the Common Core Standards for Language Arts (Student Achievement Partners, n.d.). The organization contends that rather than asking students questions about their prior knowledge or experience, teachers should expect students to contemplate text dependent questions, which are questions that can only be answered by referring explicitly back to the text in front of them.

Shift five: Writing from sources. The fifth shift is the only one that focuses on the writing aspect of literacy and language arts instruction. It stresses that the emphasis of students' writing should be to use evidence to inform readers or make an argument, as opposed to the use of the personal narrative (EngageNY, 2011). There is still a recognition that narrative writing plays an important role in instruction, but the emphasis is strongly shifted to written arguments, with specific focus on supporting those arguments with events and facts the students find in texts they read.

Shift six: Academic vocabulary. The focus of the final shift is on helping students build a larger vocabulary in order to read more complex texts in various genres. The intent is to "focus strategically on comprehension of pivotal and commonly found words" rather than context-specific words in order to strengthen the students' ability to access more complex text across content areas (EngageNY, 2011).

While many states across the country are deconstructing the standards as the main focus for implementation of Common Core, the district in this study is building on these instructional shifts as the approach to aligning instruction with Common Core in the schools. Whichever approach districts take, the end task for most is alignment before the introduction of the new assessments that will be coming with Common Core.

Common Core aligned assessments. By the 2014-2015 school year, assessments for the new Common Core Standards are expected to be implemented within schools (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, 2012). Two multistate consortia were awarded federal funds through the Race to the Top program to develop assessments aligned with the Common Core—The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for

College and Careers (PARCC) and The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. PARCC, which includes 23 states within the consortia, states their aim is to create high-quality assessments that measure the full range of the Common Core State Standards (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, 2012). PARCC is led by a Governing Board comprised of educational leaders from a subset of the states in the consortia, and they selected a non-profit organization called *Achieve* as their Project Management Partner. The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, comprised of 27 states, is also a state-led consortium "working to develop next-generation assessments that accurately measure student progress toward college- and career-readiness" (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, 2012). The Smarter Balanced Consortium is led by a governing board of state educational leaders, as well as advisors and researchers from the field of education. The assessments created by these two consortia will utilize technology for computer-based tests, which include summative and interim assessments, and aim to provide meaningful feedback and data to inform teachers' instruction, as well as provide tools for teachers to help students be successful. In addition to the traditional multiple-choice style questions found on many assessments, there will be extended response questions, technology-enhanced test items, and performance tasks that are intended to allow demonstration of critical thinking and problem solving skills (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, 2012; Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, 2012). When these assessments are put into place for students across the nation, the Common Core Standards could potentially influence instruction in classrooms to an even greater extent.

Response to the Common Core. Limited research exists on the Common Core State Standards because it is a new initiative. The current school year is the first year school districts started to implement the standards, and not every state that officially adopted the standards has begun the implementation process (Gewertz, 2011, September 14). Teachers are still trying to understand the standards, but several states, literacy scholars, and literacy organizations have spoken out with opinions regarding the new initiative.

Several state departments of education, as well as some educational agencies and organizations, have shared their support of the Common Core Standards. For example, the National Education Association stated: “NEA believes that this work on Common Standards has the potential to provide teachers with more manageable curriculum goals. Their broadness allows teachers to exercise professional judgment in planning instruction that promotes student success” (National Education Association, n.d., para. 4).

While some states, districts, and teachers praise the new standards, the Common Core Standards do not come without criticism. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) posted several open letters regarding their thoughts on the Common Core. Former NCTE President Kylene Beers clarified that NCTE was not invited to assist in authoring or providing feedback as the standards were being formed, but was invited to provide a response to a draft during the process (Beers, 2009). According to Williams (2010), the 2010 chair of the NCTE Review Team for the Common Core State Standards, the NCTE recognizes that no standards document by itself will change instruction or student learning. Instead, he said, teachers will make that change. Beers

(2009) made it clear that whether or not NCTE supports the document—it exists. Therefore, the NCTE views its purpose as focusing time and expertise on what comes next in the implementation process of the standards. Current president Keith Gilyard built on previous statements that the focus of NCTE will be on strengthening teacher networks and supporting teachers as they move to implement the standards and make their own professional decisions. He stated, “We stand opposed to any initiative or standards that would reduce educational opportunity or equity in our schools through top-down, one-size-fits-all implementation programs” (Gilyard, 2012, para. 2). He continued to reaffirm that the NCTE did not endorse the standards, and their absence of public opposition to them should not be interpreted to mean they are in favor of them. Additionally, there are criticisms to specific claims made by the Common Core State Standards Initiative. In a recent study, Porter, McMaken, Hwang, and Yang (2011) investigated the new Common Core Standards and their comparison to existing state standards as well as standards from competing countries. They found that “top-achieving countries” put a greater emphasis on performance procedures than the Common Core standards did, which was counter to the widespread notion in the United States that schools needed to lessen the focus on procedures and instead emphasize higher order cognitive demand. The researchers in this study also concluded that the Common Core Standards did not represent a meaningful, significant improvement over the existing state standards already in place, despite the insistence from the Common Core that the new standards were far more rigorous than what most states had in place. While they found a slight difference, they emphasized it was very small (Porter, 2011). Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman (2012) questioned several ideas associated with the Common Core, including the idea that skills needed in

college should start being taught in kindergarten. They also criticized the leading authors of the Standards for pushing their interpretations of the Common Core, which they feel is in direct contradiction of the Common Core Standards' premise that decisions regarding implementation should be left to the teachers and school leaders.

The Common Core State Standards will have an impact on classrooms in the majority of the states throughout the nation. The way they are interpreted and implemented, however, can vary from state to state, district to district, or school to school. These policies are one of the external impacts on a teacher's planning and instruction. In the next section, literature related to both planning and instruction in literacy will be presented.

Literacy Planning and Instruction

In the previous sections, the numerous factors that can contribute to a teacher's planning and instruction in literacy were outlined. Policy and government initiatives—especially the new Common Core State Standards Initiative—can impact teachers' classroom practice. The high-stakes assessments that test mastery of learning standards also play a large role in many teachers' planning and instruction. Commercial reading programs may contribute to the ways that individuals plan and teach, as well as a teacher's professional knowledge base. In the following section, planning and instruction in literacy will be examined in relation to the previously presented factors, as well as in relation to the present study.

Instructional planning. According to Shavelson (1983), planning is an important component of teaching that is typically carried out without the presence of students.

Sardo-Brown (1996) defined planning as "the instructional decisions made prior to the execution of plans during teaching" (p. 519). Some research exists in the area of instructional planning, although it is limited, particularly in regards to literacy instruction. McCutcheon (1980) investigated 12 elementary school teachers and how they planned their instruction. The teachers in the study expressed that the mental planning they did throughout the day was much more beneficial than the actual written, formal plans they previously created. The written plans were viewed more as a routine to carry out, rather than a meaningful experience. The study also examined what connection the existing curriculum had to the planning process. Results indicated that there was a heavy reliance on textbooks in reading because of a perceived continuity of lessons that the teachers felt was important. In some cases, however, literacy lessons were disjointed because of "picking and choosing" from a variety of textbook programs the teachers had available. The author also found that administrative policies had a significant impact on planning, including schedule changes in the school, class sizes, and whether or not the teachers had freedom to deviate from the textbook. In a three-year ethnographic study, Wendell (as cited in Sardo-Brown, 1996) found that novice secondary teachers planned mostly for content, and showed difficulty planning for instructional strategy, teaching style, or evaluation. Another study conducted by Sardo-Brown (1996) on the planning practices of novice teachers showed that the biggest factors the teachers expressed as being influential on plans were changes in schedules, textbooks and other curricular materials, assessment issues, and personal life matters. In all of these studies, outside factors seemed to impact instructional planning more than internal factors such as the teacher's knowledge base or the needs of the students.

Literacy instruction in connection to "the shifts". The field of literacy instruction encompasses a great deal of information and pedagogy. For the purposes of this paper, the following section presents literature related to the three Common Core instructional shifts that were emphasized to the teachers who participated in this study. Those shifts were balancing informational and literary text, staircase of text complexity, and text-based answers.

Balancing informational and literary text. Informational text and literary text are examples of two different genres that are used in literacy instruction. Duke and Bennett-Armistead (2003) described informational text as text that "convey(s) information about the natural or social world, typically from someone presumed to know that information to someone presumed not to…" (p. 16). Literary text, conversely, refers to both classic and contemporary literature (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) that would include traditional components such as characters, theme, and plot.

Several researchers and scholars in the field of literacy have written about the importance of including informational text in literacy instruction for all grades, but especially in primary grades (Calo, 2011; Caswell & Duke, 1998; Chall & Snow, 1988; Duke, 2000; Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003). Some scholars believe the lack of informational reading in the early grades can account for difficulties in later grades as students encounter a greater percentage of informational text in and out of the classroom (Duke, 2000). For years, emphasis has been placed on students needing to navigate informational text to gain new knowledge and information once they reach fourth grade

(Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003; Ness, 2011). There is a great deal of support in the literacy community for including more informational text in our nation's classrooms.

Another reason educators give to advocate for the inclusion of more informational text in early grades is motivation for students (Calo, 2011; Duke, 2000; Ness, 2011). Through interviews and observations of two elementary classroom teachers, Calo (2011) found that the teachers were able to build on students' curiosities and interests by incorporating more informational text into their literacy instruction. In the questionnaires developed by Ness (2011) asking elementary teachers to talk about their attitudes toward informational text, the majority of the teachers responded favorably to incorporating more informational text in the classroom. They frequently cited it as a way to expose students to new information about the world around them, which was motivating to many of their students.

While many literacy experts agree that a balance of informational and literary text is beneficial for all students, some scholars caution against too strong of a focus on only informational text. For one reason, informational text may be more challenging for many students due to the content-specific vocabulary contained in many texts that require a more extensive background knowledge than some elementary students have (Ness, 2011; Yatvin, 2012). Students in very early grades, because of their developmental stages, may have a stronger connection to and interest in texts that relate to their own lives, rather than topics with which they have limited experience (Yatvin, 2012). Additionally, when students are first practicing a newly learned comprehension strategy, they should

encounter texts that do not contain additional difficulties to navigate such as extensive background knowledge or high-level academic vocabulary (Duke & Pearson, 2002).

When selecting text for students, educators should consider more than just which side of the literary-informational dichotomy the text falls. Choosing a well-suited text for students involves multiple factors, such as consideration of the learning objective, the student's interests and motivation, and how much teacher support will be provided (Duke & Pearson, 2002). Nevertheless, the Common Core Initiative has many teachers across the nation searching for a stronger representation of informational text in their classrooms.

***Text complexity*.** For over a decade, federal and state literacy policies have frequently held as a goal to have students reading grade appropriate text by the time they finish third grade (US Department of Education, 2002). The Common Core State Standards Initiative (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) requires the reading of text in a "staircase of complexity" and asks students to be reading and comprehending literature at and above grade level by the end of the students' school year. The major concern associated with the standards is underprepared students entering college and careers. Appendix A of the Common Core Standards contains the statement that being able to read complex text independently and proficiently is necessary for high achievement in college and careers, as well as numerous life tasks (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). The document also includes the notion that moving away from complex texts is likely to lead to a "general impoverishment of

knowledge, which, because knowledge is intimately linked with reading comprehension ability, will accelerate the decline in the ability to comprehend complex texts and the decline in the richness of text itself" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 4). Other researchers support the idea that students who do not continue to climb the staircase of text complexity will face more challenges as an adult when asked to read in college or the workplace (Adams, 2010).

Readability formulas to determine the reading level of a specific passage have existed for decades, and were often the guide for creating and evaluating texts that were deemed appropriate for each grade level (Hiebert, 2012). One system for leveling text is the Lexile Leveling system (MetaMetrics, 2012), which is also included in the Common Core State Standards Appendix A (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). The Lexile measure is a numerical range providing information about either an individual's reading ability or the difficulty of a text, like a book or magazine article (MetaMetrics, 2012). The Common Core Standards have a range of Lexile levels listed as expectations for students in second through twelfth grade.

Many literacy researchers and scholars contend that students learn to read when they are taught using challenging texts and are allowed opportunities to struggle with that text in order to practice skills and strategies (Fisher, Frey, & Lapp, 2012; Morgan, Wilcox, & Eldredge, 2000; O'Connor, Swanson, & Geraghty, 2010). One approach suggested by Adams (2010) is for teachers to use a series of texts with students that focus

on the same content or topic. Students would encounter these texts at increasing levels of difficulty. The idea is that reading the texts at a lower reading level first would expose students to the content-specific vocabulary that might inhibit their reading of text at a higher level. By continuing to have the students encounter those vocabulary words at increasingly difficult levels of text, their comprehension would become stronger as they gain more knowledge about the topic through the repeated readings of a variety of texts.

Another way for classroom teachers to incorporate more grade-appropriate text in their classroom is to provide support to the students by occasionally using the text in a read aloud (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007; McLaughlin & Allen, 2009; Wiseman, 2011). The teacher could use a higher level text but read to the students so students were freed to work on higher level thinking skills and comprehension strategies. By using strategies to engage in discussion, students construct meaning together and discuss more complex themes and issues in text (Fountas & Pinnell, 2007). This could alleviate concerns that students might be asked to read text that is too difficult before they are ready to do so.

Some researchers and scholars in literacy caution teachers about increasing the level of text students are asked to read too quickly (Allington, 2002; Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). There is concern that students will spend too much time reading text that is too challenging. Allington (2002) conducted a study on exemplary teachers in elementary classrooms teaching in six states across the United States. One factor that was common in these teachers was that they rejected district pressures to ask all students to read the same textbook or trade book, recognizing that these practices did not result in high achievement in literacy and were not research based. Allington stressed that students

need to spend a large part of their reading time engaged in what he calls successful reading, defined as “reading experiences in which students perform with a high level of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension” (Allington, 2002, p. 3). If students are unable to read with high accuracy and fluency, their comprehension will be significantly impacted. Additionally, Clay (1993) recommended practice in applying strategies on “just-difficult-enough texts”. Her philosophy was that a teacher should provide students with experiences over time in which the student could be successful and move up a gradient of difficulty of texts. This practice would support fluent and successful reading. Fountas and Pinnell (1996) recommended a guided reading approach, where students read text that is leveled with support from their teacher as they practice strategies “on the run” in small groups. One of the reasons the students are able to be successful with these texts is that they can read and understand the majority of the words in the book.

While these and other researchers may agree that increasing text complexity gradually with readers is an effective approach to strengthening students’ overall reading, the caution exists on how quickly this is done. Teachers should keep their students’ strengths and needs in mind when planning instruction in literacy and in selecting both the level of the text being used as well as the instructional approach to that text.

Text dependent questions and answers. Within the Common Core (as well as within the professional development for the teachers involved with the present study), there is an emphasis on asking questions and encouraging answers that are strictly dependent upon the text the students are reading. According to Coleman and Pimentel (2010), two of the leading Common Core authors, “Eighty to 90 percent of the Reading

Standards in each grade require text dependent analysis; accordingly, aligned curriculum materials should have a similar percentage of text-dependent questions" (p. 6). Questions that are text dependent can only be answered from careful reading of the specific text that is being used in a lesson.

Advocates for this type of questioning assert that allowing students to respond with personal connections or information from prior knowledge does not require them to attend to the text at hand (Student Achievement Partners, n.d.). Instead, according to advocates for text dependent questioning, students can respond to those types of questions without having read the text at all. Some scholars in literacy feel that effective questions need to be tied to the text (Afflerbach, 2007). This type of questioning can help students to focus on key details found in text that might be critical to overall comprehension (Taboada, Bianco, & Bowerman, 2012).

While there may be great value in eliciting key details from text to respond to a question, using prior knowledge and making personal connections are also useful reading comprehension tools. These strategies can significantly strengthen a student's comprehension of text (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Antsey & Freebody, 1987; Cunningham & Shagoury, 2005; Gallagher, 2011; Gregory & Cahill, 2010; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; Wetzels, Kester, van Merrienboer, & Broers, 2011). Some literacy experts believe a lack of prior knowledge is what impedes the comprehension of texts for many students (Gallagher, 2011; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007). When students are able to connect new knowledge to old knowledge, they have a better understanding of the content. Additionally, Alvermann & Hague (1989) found that spending time working

with students on activating their prior knowledge in connection to a class discussion allowed teachers to recognize and work through misconceptions students held about certain topics and content. Without these discussions, teachers may not become aware of misinformation that students hold in certain content areas. Spending time to activate prior knowledge with students, or to provide background knowledge before approaching a text, can strengthen the students' comprehension of that text in significant ways.

Making personal connections to a text is another comprehension strategy that can strongly aide students in their comprehension (Eikmeier, 2008; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; Tovani, 2000). According to Miller (2002), these personal connections can link new content to personal experiences or previously encountered texts to help students understand various components of the text, such as character motivation or structures of specific genres. These connections can come from many types of texts that students navigate, including books, movies, and advertisements. Eikmeier (2008) suggested using popular culture references found in television shows to help students make personal connections to text. Because readers bring with them experiences and prior knowledge to every text they encounter, it is nearly impossible to stay completely within the confines of a specific text (Wilson & Newkirk, 2011).

Teachers need to consider the reading task as well as the needs of the students when designing literacy lessons in class. Asking students questions that require them to attend to important details in the text can strengthen their comprehension, but should be balanced with opportunities to share personal connections and previous background knowledge.

Previous studies have examined how many factors can influence a teacher's instruction, including a professional knowledge base, adopted reading programs, high-stakes testing, and educational reform policies. The purpose of this study is to investigate the question: How do elementary teachers plan and implement literacy instruction? Using a theoretical framework rooted in critical theory, findings will be presented related to how the teachers in the current study made decisions related to literacy plans and instruction. In the following chapter, the methodology utilized, as well as data sources and procedures for analysis, will be summarized. Following that, an overview of the data collected and the findings and implications for the literacy field will be shared.

Chapter Three: Methods

In the following sections, the design and methods of the research study will be explained, beginning with an overview of critical ethnography and the reasons this is an effective method of qualitative research for this study. After that, information on the research site and participants that were included in the study will be presented. Finally, the data sources collected, as well as the process for analyzing data, will be shared.

Methodology

Critical ethnography was the methodology used in this study to explore the research question: How do elementary teachers plan and implement literacy instruction? According to Foley (1990), "Ethnography is the craft of writing critical, reflective, empirical accounts of your personal fieldwork experiences" (p. xix). It is the researcher attempting to think critically about the issue and context that is being studied. Ethnographers combine firsthand experiences with their awareness of other forms of social life besides their own in order to get a better picture of aspects of the society they are studying (Erickson, 1984).

Ethnography has become a valuable research methodology for studying various aspects of education and schooling. Since the 1990s, classrooms across the country have become the most frequently researched sites and cultures for ethnographers (Heath & Street, 2008). According to Erickson (1986), the key to educational research is addressing the "invisibility of everyday life". Researchers embraced the idea that smaller groups within a classroom could be studied to lead to a more thorough understanding of

different experiences of both students and teachers (Heath, 1983; Spindler & Spindler, 1989). Ethnography allows researchers to view literacy development, instruction, and learning as they naturally occur within sociocultural contexts (Purcell-Gates, 2011). Ethnographers also recognize that they are studying "the representations of experience, not experience itself" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 417). By using ethnographic methods, there is a potential to engage literacy teachers critically with questions that deal with what literacy is and how it changes, as well as who determines the best approach to teaching literacy (Hamilton, 1999). Ethnography is, therefore, an appropriate method to explore the ways that elementary teachers plan and teach reading, as well as what factors influence their decisions about literacy instruction.

Critical Ethnography

A theoretical lens of critical theory made the use of critical ethnography appropriate for this study as the ways that the issues of power in schooling were explored, particularly through the implementation of new educational policies, and the impact those polices have on literacy instruction. Pasco (2003) asserted that critical ethnography allows the researcher to reposition himself or herself in a way to view educational structures from the perspectives of those who are directly impacted by control or power. Being critical requires a concern over the intersection of power, oppression, and privilege, as well as a focus on issues of equity, social justice, and politics embedded within social structures (Cannella & Lincoln, 2011; Quantz, 1992). Critical ethnography in education "stresses the notion that all education is intrinsically political, and consequently it must advocate for the oppressed by dominating the nature of oppressing,

the process of empowerment…" (Trueba, 1999, p. 593). For the purposes of this study, critical ethnography is defined using Proweller's (1988) explanation that critical ethnographers "set their sights on exposing structural forms of domination that place constraints and limitations on individual lives" (p. 210). In the case of this study, the structural forms of domination are the implementation of policies limiting the teaching lives of elementary literacy teachers.

Critical ethnographies have been used in education for decades. Many of these ethnographies examine school sites as places that reproduce the ideologies of the dominant cultures, replicate the class systems in society, and marginalize students that are of nondominant backgrounds (Foley, 1990; Heath, 1983; McLaren, 1986). In Heath's study, she explored the ways in which schools use a dominant language system that is often unrelated to the ways in which language is used in the homes of some of the students. Foley (1990) and McLaren (1986) both explored ways that schools continue to reinforce the dominant ideologies of capitalism and class systems. Similar to Foley's (1990) use of ethnography to "think critically and imaginatively about my country and how these youth and I have been shaped" (p. xix), this critical ethnography examines the issues of power that are created through the implementation of federal policy and how that shapes the way teachers make decisions regarding their literacy instruction.

Examination of culture. Most, if not all, definitions of ethnography focus on the study of a culture (Denzin, 1997; Fetterman, 1982; Foley, 2002; Heath, 1982; Maanen, 2001; Murchison, 2009; Parman, 1998; Purcell-Gates, 2000; Spindler & Spindler, 1982: Spindler & Spindler, 1988; Wilcox, 1982; Wolcott, 1997). Maanen (2001) refers to

ethnography as "the study of the culture(s) a given group of people more or less share (p. 40). For Willis (1977), the interest in a given culture is what makes a study ethnographic. It is both the process and the product of studying culture (Tedlock, 2000; Wolcott, 1997). Culture can be defined in countless ways and its meaning changes over time and across different contexts (Eisenhart, 2001). The culture of any given society is composed of the concepts, language, and beliefs that are attributed to the members of that group in a particular context (Goodenough, 1976). According to Wolcott (1999), "Culture refers to the various ways different groups go about their lives and to the belief systems associated with that behavior" (p. 25). These definitions and explanations describe the concept of culture for this study through the examination of elementary teachers' participation in the process of planning and teaching literacy for their students, and the common language and beliefs they shared in relation to this instruction. In the case of this research study, the culture under investigation is the group of literacy teachers at the selected elementary school. These teachers share a common physical environment, as well as common discourses necessary to teach within that environment. They also share the common pressures of federal funding, mandated educational policies, and a shared history of professional development within the school district.

Making the familiar strange. Another essential concept, "making the familiar strange", is essentially at the heart of ethnography (Erickson, 1984; Wilcox, 1982). This idea involves noticing what is often taken for granted by either the researcher or the participants as "the norm" or "commonplace", and making it extraordinary in some way through the process and product of ethnography. Planning for literacy instruction

initially might seem to be a very familiar task, particularly to teachers responsible for literacy instruction. Through ethnographic research, this seemingly common issue is examined in a new way.

Ethnography is a valuable methodological approach to investigating a culture or group of individuals through firsthand experience and attempting to capture the uniqueness of a seemingly familiar phenomenon. From a critical perspective, ethnography allows the researcher to reflect on issues of power and domination within certain cultures and groups. According to Bourgois (2002), there is a need for a kind of ethnography that examines theory in relation to politics in ways that are relevant to the participants of the study. Combining all of the aspects of ethnography, the following question was explored: How do elementary teachers plan and implement the literacy instruction for their class?

In the sections that follow, the reasons and process for selecting the school site, as well as the procedure for selecting and recruiting participants for the study, will be shared. Next, the three types of data sources collected—fieldnotes from firsthand observations, interviews with participants, and physical artifacts—will be presented. Finally, the process used for analyzing the data collected will be outlined.

The School Site

Wayne Rogers Elementary[1] is a small, older elementary school in the western part of the United States. Despite its proximity to a major university, the school district of which Wayne Rogers is a part is somewhat geographically isolated from other school

districts in the state, as well as from larger metropolitan areas. Most of the teachers at the school site received their educational training at the local university, and continued professional development completely through the school district, due to the location of the school.

While walking down the hallways of Wayne Rogers, one can see the typical institutional white walls brightened by numerous murals depicting popular fairytales and children's stories. A visitor is also likely to see staff members and volunteers working with students at hallway tables, in the staff lounge, or in a quiet corner. The school has a main building which houses some of the third grade classes, as well as fifth and sixth grades, the office, the cafeteria, and the library. A back building has just three classrooms and a computer lab. Additionally, portable style classrooms are situated around the front and sides of the main building, which contain the remaining classes. The physical structure and layout of the school, while smaller than some in the district, is typical of many schools in this area.

School Information and History

Wayne Rogers Elementary School has approximately 430 students enrolled between grades kindergarten and six. In this Title One school, half of the students are classified as Limited English Proficiency and over eighty percent of the students qualify for the free or reduced lunch program. Over the last five years, the school has made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) on the state standardized assessments every other year. The school alternated between making AYP and being on the watch list each school year.

The principal has been at this site for more than five years, with many staff members spending the majority of their career in this school site as well.

The climate of the school was very positive. Lunch periods were spent in casual conversation, most often unrelated to school, and instead focused on social lives, updates on family members, or general joking around. Some of the teachers attributed the positive climate to the administration at the school. They all spoke highly of their principal, making comments about "loving her" and "feeling respected" by her, even if their opinions sometimes differed from hers. The fact that they were not "policed" in the implementation of the district adopted reading series was the most frequently stated reason for feeling like their professional judgment was respected in the school.

Access

The actual data collection occurred over three months of the 2011-2012 school year, but prior experiences with Wayne Rogers allowed for an easier transition into the research site. Bringing university students to the campus to tutor students for two years prior to the start of the research created opportunities for becoming acquainted with several faculty members, as well as students. This familiarity allowed access to be developed more easily. Access is described by Burgess (as cited in Proweller, 1998), as "a social process that requires ongoing negotiation between principal investigators and researched participants not only at the beginning of a study when one first enters the field but importantly through the time spent on site" (p. 213). In addition to previous experiences in the school, the process of building access continued throughout the study by spending the majority of the school day, four days a week, at the school site.

Opportunities arose to learn about family and interests of staff members, to hear about important events in their lives, and to joke along with them during lunch. While becoming a true "member" of the culture at Wayne Rogers was not possible, there was a feeling of general acceptance by many of the staff at the site.

Establishing and maintaining a strong rapport with participants throughout the study despite the intrusions of observations and interviews can be challenging, but is important for developing a sense of trust between the researcher and participants (Proweller, 1998; Wolcott, 1995). The teachers in this study would potentially be talking about issues of power within the school system, and it was crucial for there to be an established trustworthiness for them to feel comfortable sharing their beliefs and feelings. Carefully watching what others do and say, following their lead, and becoming part of their conversations is how ethnographers are potentially able to begin to grasp what is meaningful to them, and to develop a rapport that is critical to a study's success (Eisenhart, 2001).

Recruiting Participants

Recruitment of teachers for the study took place on a chilly afternoon in early December. After receiving an email about the research study, the principal extended an invitation to attend the first part of a staff meeting, and she was more than accommodating with any requests. Teachers were welcoming and friendly as they entered the classroom. After hearing an explanation of the study and an official reading of the IRB recruitment script, teachers were told they could put their consent forms in the mail using the prepaid envelopes they were given. Instead of mailing the forms, five teachers

promptly consented and turned in the forms personally at the conclusion of the meeting (one additional teacher did mail hers). Due to concern about maintaining their privacy, the consent forms were quickly put away so it was not obvious they were volunteering. However, it became clear that confidentiality was not a concern of most teachers, as one participant remarked, “We don’t really have anything to hide here at Wayne Rogers”.

Participants

A total of six participants became the primary informants in this study (Foley, 1995; Proweller, 1998). The primary informants were the classroom teachers who consented to participation in the study by agreeing to allow weekly observations in their classrooms and weekly interviews for the duration of the study. Any teacher that had his or her own classroom and was responsible for literacy instruction was eligible as a primary informant for this study. A teacher was only excluded from being a participant if he or she was not responsible for literacy instruction of students. The six volunteers indicated their willingness to participate by submitting the consent form. This was a very manageable number to observe and interview weekly. If too large a group is studied, there can be too much information to monitor and it can be difficult to narrow in on information that is significant to the research question at hand (Erickson, 1984). By attending to a smaller group of people within the school that were part of a larger group, I was able to gain a deeper insight into their thoughts during the decision-making process of planning and implementing literacy instruction.

Table 1 gives a brief overview of each of the participants. Each participant was asked to choose a pseudonym in order to offer them as much anonymity as possible

(Foley, 1990). They were all very accommodating and flexible with the scheduled interview and observation times. Some of them purposely suggested alternate times for classroom observation so that different components of their literacy instruction could be observed.

Maggie was in her sixteenth year of teaching, with all her years in education in a kindergarten classroom. She spoke often of loving the kindergarten age, and it showed through her enthusiasm in the classroom. Maggie was able to see changes in education before and after policies like No Child Left Behind were put in place, with a lot more emphasis in the classroom now on academics and testing and less time for students to play and explore. She had 23 students in her classroom this year, and balanced her instruction between whole group and small group lessons. In the early part of her career she taught half-day kindergarten, but was very glad to be in full day now to have more time to work with her students. Systematic phonics instruction, with lots of repetition of letter names and sounds, as well as manipulating those sounds in words, was at the heart of her instructional approach to reading. Maggie typically approached this by choosing different components of a variety of reading programs that she had available to her. Despite her grade level being on their own most often (kindergarten was the only team that did not work with another grade level during Professional Learning Communities), Maggie often forged professional relationships with the first grade teachers in order to collaborate more on what they hoped her students would be ready for when they approached first grade.

Sharon still considered herself a newcomer to Wayne Rogers, with this year being her second at the school. She also viewed herself as a new teacher in many ways (she was in her seventh year of teaching) but felt she was really starting to get a grasp on certain components of instruction and classroom management. All of her teaching experiences were in first grade, and she had 17 students during the time of this study. She had a high level of energy in the classroom and was always willing to take on new approaches and activities. Sharon was the only participant who did not receive any of her education from the local university. She valued professional development, and expressed feeling validated when her colleagues were utilizing approaches similar to her own instruction in their classrooms. She frequently expressed that it was important for her to do her part in preparing the students for success on future standardized tests, as well as getting them ready for graduation and college.

Fran was the most experienced teacher in the study, with 24 years in education. She taught almost every grade level from second to sixth, and was in her second year teaching third grade. She had 17 students in a very tiny classroom, but never complained and made the best use of her space. Fran volunteered frequently during her career to attend district trainings and classes, and attended three in the course of our study. She tended to implement new strategies and ideas with fidelity initially, and then change things as she saw necessary to fit the needs of her students.

Emily was the participant who was newest to teaching—she was in her fourth year overall and second year in fourth grade. During the study, Emily was in the process of completing her final semester of a graduate program in literacy. She felt that giving

kids time to sit and read to develop an enjoyment of reading was the most important part of her literacy instruction in school. Emily often had her class of 35 students share ideas with a partner or work together to complete assignments.

Although Nikki was in her eleventh year of teaching, she commented several times that she felt like a second year teacher this year. She was changing a lot of her instructional approaches in the classroom this year, partly due to her thesis work and partly due to professional development in which she was involved. At the heart of literacy instruction in Nikki's class were questions generated by her 23 students about a piece of text, as well as challenging students as much as possible through the texts they read and tasks they completed. Nikki spent two years of her career at Wayne Rogers in the role of instructional coach. Although she was back in the classroom during this study, she frequently presented at schooolwide staff meetings or served as the person on site that some teachers would turn to for recommendations on instruction.

Lauren was in her ninth year of teaching, but first year at Wayne Rogers Elementary. She was asked to come to the school because of the larger number of students requiring special education services. She was one of two special education teachers at this site. Lauren spent her whole teaching career in special education, but with recently receiving her general education licensure, she was considering trying to change to a position as a regular education classroom. She worked with students at all grade levels from kindergarten to sixth at Wayne Rogers.

As often typical in ethnography, there were several secondary informants who provided their perspective involving teachers' planning and instruction in literacy (Foley,

1995; Proweller, 1998). Secondary informants are people who are regularly at the research site, or are part of the culture being studied, but are not considered one of the primary informants. The secondary informants did not participate in formal interviews, nor was instruction observed in their classroom. In this study, the secondary informants were staff members at Wayne Rogers that offered opinions and information related to literacy instruction through informal conversation during encounters in the hallways and staff room. Additionally, a district level administrator shared information about the district's process for implementing Common Core during informal contact away from the research site. Access to this district administrator occurred regularly; therefore, discussion of the district's plan in relation to my study was part of regular and natural conversation. In all cases, secondary informants were aware of the research that was occurring when they volunteered opinions and information.

The initial process of recruiting participants that felt comfortable participating was a crucial step in the success of the study (Eisenhart, 2001; Proweller, 1998; Wolcott, 1995). Once consent was received, entrance to the research site and data collection began. In the following section, the types of data collected—fieldnotes from observations, interviews with participants, and physical documents—will be presented in detail.

Data Collection

In accordance with typical data collection in ethnographic research, data sources came from firsthand observation in the teachers' classrooms, fieldnotes from those observations, interviews with participants, and physical artifacts collected during the

course of the study (Foley, 1995; Heath, 1983; Proweller, 1998; Wolcott, 1997). In the following sections, the process of data collection in each of these areas will be shared.

Length of time in the field. Traditional ethnography has required researchers to spend a minimum of one year in the field (Murchison, 2009; Powell, 2006; Tedlock, 2000). However, several ethnographic researchers now maintain that it may be necessary, and in some cases even desirable, to carry out the fieldwork part of ethnography in a shorter time frame (Hammersley, 2006; Heath & Street, 2008; Spindler & Spindler, 1992). According to Hammersley (2006), the intensification of work requirements at universities and pressure for productivity leads to the time requirement being less demanding. Spindler and Spindler (1992) assert that there "is no hard and fast rule regarding what constitutes sufficient time on the site" (p. 65). What is necessary is enough time to permit the researcher to see things happening not just once, but repeatedly over time. Three months could be considered an adequate and desirable amount of time to study a smaller culture such as a classroom (Spindler & Spindler, 1992). Heath and Street (2008) referred to this as somewhat of a "compressed time mode" (p. 63), which allows researchers to inhabit a site for shorter periods of time than the traditional year but in intensive periods, during which time the researchers tries to see as much as possible that is relevant to the participants.

The reason for immersion in a site is to enable the researcher to experience firsthand ordinary routines and conditions under which the participants work and conduct their lives, as well as pressures that may exist in those environments (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Furthermore, by allowing less time intensive ethnography to be considered

acceptable in the research field, the use of ethnography is encouraged as a research technique to a wider field of scholars (Wolcott, 1999).

In accordance with the suggestion from Spindler and Spindler (1992), data collection for this study took place for three months at the school site. For four days a week, the entire school day was spent on site, either in the staff lounge, library, or hallways in between classroom observations and teacher interviews. This period of time was long enough for multiple components of the teachers' literacy instruction to be observed, as well as behaviors repeated several times or comments in interviews made on multiple occasions. Once the analysis of data showed that participants were sharing the same remarks, and the same events were seen repeatedly in the classroom, it was clear that new ideas or themes were not occurring. At that point, data collection continued for several more weeks in case anything changed in the school site or with the teachers.

Firsthand observation with fieldnotes. Direct observation of activity relevant to the phenomena under investigation is a crucial component in ethnographic research (Angrosino, 2005; Fetterman, 1982; Hammersley, 2006; Maanen, 2001; Powell, 2006; Wilcox, 1982; Wolcott, 1997). According to Adler and Adler (1994), "Observation has been characterized as the fundamental base of all research methods" (p. 389). Ethnographers who incorporate firsthand observation into their research are able to be more thorough and reflective in describing everyday events in a society, as well as in their attempts to identify the significance of these events from various points of view (Erickson, 1986). Additionally, it is through observing what people say and do and

slowly becoming part of their groups and conversations that ethnographers begin to have a chance at understanding what is meaningful to the group in the study (Eisenhart, 2001).

In this study, each participant was observed once a week during literacy instruction time for approximately 60 minutes over the course of three months. This allowed for multiple opportunities to observe instructional decision-making and planning by teachers in an attempt to capture what was "typical" for each participant. Over the course of the study, observations of different components of the literacy block for each of the teachers took place, including small group instruction, whole group instruction, writing time, and literacy intervention (in some of the classrooms). In a 60-minute time span, the implementation of literacy plans, as well as adjusted plans made in the moment, were observed. In a shorter amount of time, patterns of instruction repeated over time may not have been observable. According to Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), "Ethnographic field research involves the study of groups and people as they go about their everyday lives." (p. 1). By having weekly observations of each teacher over the course of three months, an understanding of the everyday lives of the teachers was able to be captured.

In accordance with other ethnographic studies, fieldnotes were taken during the classroom observations (Foley, 1990; Heath, 1983; Proweller, 1998) describing the instruction implemented by the teacher, as well as questions that arose related to what was observed. Fieldnotes were recorded on a simple template that included a place for the time, the literacy event, and questions that arose. "Literacy event" was defined as any activity that focused on reading, writing, or language development that occurred in the

classroom and was led by the teacher. This designation was made in order to eliminate notetaking on classroom management tasks or conversations unrelated to literacy. Taking fieldnotes allowed for the description of literacy events as they occurred, which enabled certain events to be referenced later in interviews with teachers. It also allowed for reflection in the moment, which frequently led to questions about the literacy instruction in the classroom.

The fieldnotes from direct observation was an important source of data for this study (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Heath, 1983; Heath & Street, 2008; Wolcott, 1995). They provided a description of events that occurred in the classroom directly related to the participants' planning of literacy, as well as a way to capture reflection on these events while they occurred.

Participant interviews. Extensive interviewing of participants that interact within the culture being investigated is another critical component to ethnographic research and is used by many noted ethnographers (Foley, 1995; Heath, 1983; Proweller, 1998; Spindler, 1974; Spindler & Spindler, 1982, 1988). Through these interviews, the researcher is better able to gain the insider's perspective on the phenomena under investigation. According to Wolcott (1995), "…fieldworkers who ask no questions are sorely tempted to become their own informants" (p. 105). Interviewing allows the informants' perspectives to be central to the study under investigation.

For this research study, each teacher was interviewed for 30 to 40 minutes once a week to debrief on the lesson that was observed, as well as to discuss other issues that were brought up related to literacy instruction. These interviews were critical for gaining

the perspective of the participants on the subject of literacy instruction and planning. While the observations allowed planning to be seen "in action", the interviews provided insight on the teachers' thought process while making the plans, as well as their reasons for planning and teaching the way they did. The teachers were asked to provide their first choice of time and location for the interviews. One teacher was interviewed before school, one after school, and the rest during their lunch period. Most interviews were held in the teachers' classrooms, which proved helpful when the teacher wanted to quickly locate materials or plans that arose in the conversation.

Each of the interviews was audiotaped (with prior consent of the participant) so that accurate transcriptions could be done with each interview session. All of the interviews were transcribed within two days of the interview. Transcribing allowed the development of familiarity with the data before the process of analysis even began. Although there was a general set of guiding questions, listed in the Appendix, for every interview, the interviews were always conversational in nature and open for the teachers to discuss what they felt was most significant about their planning for literacy instruction (Wolcott, 1995). Ethnographers should not restrict themselves to only one form of questioning—they should alternate between directive and nondirective questioning, depending on the purpose of the questions (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). By conducting interviews in this manner, the participants had more opportunity to discuss the factors in literacy instruction that were most important to them, as opposed to focusing solely on my initial interests or assumptions. When researchers ask only predetermined questions, the resulting responses are likely narrowed to the agenda of the

interviewer, and can run the risk of damaging rapport between researcher and participant if the participant feels their own views and ideas are less valued (Hammersley, 2006; Wolcott, 1995). The conversational type of interview allowed teachers who are often made “voiceless” by the dominant forces controlling their classroom activities an opportunity to have a voice.

Physical artifacts. As per ethnographic methods (Heath, 1983; Proweller, 1998), several physical artifacts were collected to provide more data and insight into the planning process of classroom teachers. These artifacts included lesson plans, handouts from professional development, and instructional materials that were used in literacy lessons that were observed. Most of the teachers provided a copy of their lesson plans at some point during the study. The plans were helpful in giving insight into how detailed the teachers planned out their literacy instruction prior to the day of the lesson, as well as what they felt were the most important pieces to the lesson (what they chose to write on the plan). Additionally, some of the plans included items like the Common Core Standards covered. Several teachers participated in district trainings on Common Core during the course of our time together. These teachers offered materials they received at the trainings, which included exemplar lesson plans to try in the classroom, an overview of the Common Core Shifts, and copies from a “Common Core Lesson Plan Book” (The Common Core Institute, 2011). These materials were referred to throughout the data collection and analysis to compare the information that the district was providing with the information gathered from the participants. Finally, many of the teachers offered copies of instructional materials they used with their students during literacy instruction. Most

often these included graphic organizers, including a story map that was supposed to be used districtwide. One teacher provided blank copies of organizers, as well as several completed by students to give a picture of the finished product.

Fieldnotes from observations of the literacy instruction of participants, transcripts from interviews with participants, and physical artifacts related to literacy instructional planning provided a wide range of data throughout the study. The combination of firsthand observation allowed reflection on the planning that was being implemented during instruction, and the interviews and physical artifacts provided a glimpse into the perspective of the literacy teachers that were doing the planning.

Researcher's Stance

In accordance with critical ethnographic research methods, it was essential to remain reflexive through the course of the study (Anderson, 1989; Foley, 1990, 2002; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Lather, 1991). In ethnography, the concept of reflexivity is key to recognizing that the researcher is part of the social world that is being studied, and that previous background and experiences will always influence the interpretation of the research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). Foley (2002) explains reflexivity as a process that ethnographers use to reveal their own mental states and general critiques of situations, which allows the ethnographer to situate his or her research within historical contexts. This reflexivity needed to be maintained throughout the data collection and data analysis process.

The research question in this study evolved partially from my own prior experiences with power struggles within school districts. As a public school educator, I saw many instances where teachers—myself included—had been deskilled and stripped of the power to make decisions about the instruction within their own classrooms. In most of my experiences, this disempowerment was caused primarily by mandated fidelity to the scripts in commercial reading programs and strict adherence to district created pacing guides. While this was not the case at Wayne Rogers Elementary School, my own experiences with the power relations of school systems played a large role in shaping my critical perspective.

During the course of my observations in the classroom, I was aware that my critical stance as a researcher was directly related to what I chose to focus on in my observations. At the beginning, I tried to attend to as much as possible, not knowing what would become relevant to the study. As time progressed, my observations became more focused as I began to determine what was more relevant based on the kinds of things teachers regularly did or discussed, which is typical in ethnographic observation (Angrosino & Rosenberg, 2011).

Reflexivity was important during the interviews as well. I needed to be fully aware of my own critical perspective and be cautious not to lead the participants with my types of questions. For this reason, I tried to keep the interviews very conversational and often let the participants lead with topics. I also used a form of "member checking" (Anderson, 1989) as a way to check some of my understandings, such as what the biggest impacts on planning and teaching were, with the thoughts of the participants. I shared the

transcripts of interviews with each participant halfway through the study and again at the end of the study, and I encouraged any feedback or questions.

I did not reveal my critical stance to participants during the course of the study in order to limit any influence that might have on their responses to my questions during interviews. At the conclusion of the study, I shared all of the interview transcripts with the participants and invited questions from them. Only one teacher asked more specific questions about whether my findings on Common Core were negative or positive. Since the study concluded in the latter part of the school year, there was insufficient time to turn the study into a participatory action research approach (Brydon-Miller, Kral, Maguire, Noffke, & Sabhlok, 2011), where cycles of action and reflection aimed at working collaboratively with the participants to determine ways in which they could take a stronger role in the interpretation of policy in their classrooms would take place. Therefore, this study remains descriptive in nature, with my own critical perspective as the basis for representation.

Limitations

It was informative to study the factors that impacted the planning and instruction of the literacy teachers at Wayne Rogers. During the time of the study, the teachers shared substantial information regarding the way they taught reading and writing, as well as the significant role outside factors like Common Core played in their planning and instruction.

Some potential limitations exist in this study. The study may have been strengthened by spending a full academic year in the field. This would have allowed insight into how teachers' instruction and beliefs changed from the onset of the Common Core implementation to the completion of one school year teaching under the standards. The teachers at Wayne Rogers were at the beginning of the process of developing a thorough understanding of Common Core and the role it would play in their classrooms. A full year at the school site would also have allowed for more access, which could further strengthen the rapport built with participants, as well as with secondary informants at the school site. Additionally, it would be beneficial to return to the school site during the teachers' second year teaching with Common Core to examine ways in which they discuss the same impacts they did in the first year and ways they continue to change based on various policies. With the development of the assessment system aligned with Common Core not yet in place, returning to the school site in the second or third year of implementation would provide information on how much the creation of the assessment was further impacting literacy instruction and assessment. It would also be beneficial to examine how the district's interpretation of Common Core changed, if at all, and how that might impact the teachers at Wayne Rogers.

Another potential limitation that exists is that the study occurred at a school site that was not facing additional pressures from several consecutive years of unsuccessfully making Adequate Yearly Progress. After making AYP the previous school year, the school principal allowed greater professional freedom in curriculum choices with the teachers at Wayne Rogers, especially by lifting the mandate of using the district reading

series. This may not have happened if the school faced a second or third consecutive year failing to make significant gains on state standardized tests. Further studies using a similar research question and methodology at a school site that was mandated to implement specific instructional programs and practices may yield different results and would be beneficial to the literacy field. Additionally, potential future changes in the AYP status of Wayne Rogers Elementary might impact the planning and instruction done by the teachers, which would be beneficial to investigate in future studies.

Data Analysis

Analysis of the data was ongoing throughout the research study, and the process began as soon as interviews were transcribed and fieldnotes were written up. It was essential for observations recorded in fieldnotes to be reflected upon in a timely manner through more thorough and detailed writing in order to maintain the richness of the events, rather than waiting several days and simply summarizing what occurred (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). Additionally, timely transcription of fieldnotes and interviews allowed for early familiarity with the data. In order to answer the question, how do elementary teachers plan and implement literacy instruction?, all fieldnotes and interview transcripts were analyzed through the use of coding. In ethnography, coding often involves line-by-line categorization of data (Charmaz, 2011; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). The researcher looks for repeated and regular patterns of both action and dialogue that begin to characterize the group under study (Eisenhart, 2001).

First, data analysis began with the teacher interviews in order to gain the teachers' perspectives on how they planned and taught literacy. In the initial coding stage, "open

coding" was used (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), where the main idea present in each line of the transcription of interviews was indicated in the margins. The codes used in this stage are listed in Table 2. Familiarity with data through the transcription process, as well as through numerous rereadings of those transcriptions and field notes, helped to generate these preliminary codes, a common technique in qualitative data analysis (Proweller, 1998). Coding data line by line is also a method that allows the researcher to truly interact with data and know it thoroughly (Charmaz, 2011). After coding the teacher interview transcripts with these initial open codes, the same open coding technique was used with fieldnotes of classroom observation. The same codes were typically able to be used since observations of literacy instruction included many of the same concepts discussed in teacher interviews. However, some codes were added that were not evident in the interview transcripts. For example, the code of "ST" was not used in the beginning stages of coding interviews, as there was no mention of students. However, when field notes focused on students, the code was used. Physical artifacts were not used in the open coding stage, other than to note the main focus of each artifact (for example, whether it was a professional development resource, a lesson plan, or an instructional tool). It was after this initial open coding process that a secondary round of more focused coding took place.

Based on what was found through the open coding stage, the data was coded next using focused coding (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). In this process of focused coding, the common ideas that each individual participant repeatedly spoke of in the interview process, as well as what was observed in the classroom, were reviewed. The code

representing a reference to Common Core was seen most frequently, so this was further separated into specific aspects of Common Core. The codes, shown in Table 2, representing references to the use of informational text, text dependency, and whole class or small group instruction were created and data was analyzed for evidence of all of these factors in order to answer the research question about how teachers implemented literacy instruction. The lesson plans that served as physical artifacts were also analyzed at this stage with the codes identified for focused coding. This allowed a third piece of evidence to show teachers' use of ideas related to Common Core, as well as other aspects of literacy instruction, that were recorded in the initial lesson planning stage. The critical perspective taken in this ethnography influenced the kinds of themes that were identified within the transcriptions of interviews and field notes from observations. By locating these recurring ideas within the data, a picture of truth was not being created, but rather an interpretation of the teachers' experiences based on the historical and social contexts at the time of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

The third step in the data analysis process involved focused coding based on aspects of a teacher's professional knowledge base. During the initial open coding stage, references to pedagogical content knowledge were noted on several occasions during the analysis of observations of instruction as well as the teacher interviews. In order to thoroughly explore all of the influences on a teachers' planning and instruction for literacy, all of the interview and observation data was coded for references to a teacher's knowledge base, using the focused codes related to content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, curriculum knowledge, and strategic knowledge (seen in Table 2).

Finally, the last round of focused coding by individual participant took place. The two components of the research question—planning and teaching—were utilized to code the data and analyze ways that these two processes were talked about and observed separate from each other. Data related to planning was highlighted in pink, while data related to instruction was highlighted in green.

Once the most common themes were established for each teacher, those were used as codes to do a cross-case analysis, looking for ways that different teachers spoke about the same concepts. This process occurred several times, with careful analysis each time, to dig deeper into what the participants were focused on when talking about planning and teaching reading. The same coding techniques were employed with the field notes taken during classroom instruction observations, as well as some of the physical artifacts, to look for similarities and differences between what the teachers spoke about and what was observed in their instruction.

This multi-step process using all forms of data served as a way to triangulate data sources. While this triangulation process does not guarantee that inferences and interpretations were "correct", it does serve as a way to establish more trustworthiness with the data (Anderson, 1989; Foley, 1995; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). A method of "respondent validation" was used, which is a triangulation technique that involves checking inferences drawn from one set of data by collecting data from another source and comparing it at different phases of the research process (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). By comparing interpretations using all three types of data sources several times

throughout the process of data collection, it is more likely a conclusion was not being drawn based on isolated incidents.

Ethnographic methods, including interviews, fieldnotes, and collection of physical artifacts, were critical for exploring the research question, “How do elementary teachers plan and implement literacy instruction?”. Through the detailed and thorough coding of data collected, insight was gained on the planning process of literacy teachers, including what factors were the biggest influence on their planning and instruction. From a critical perspective, the methodology of ethnography was utilized to examine existing power structures that impacted how the teachers made instructional decisions related to literacy. In the following section, the data collected will be presented. Data is represented by illustrating the most common factors related to the participants’ planning and instruction in literacy, which will be done by sharing vignettes of the teachers’ literacy instruction, excerpts from transcripts of interviews with teachers, and descriptions of physical artifacts collected.

Chapter Four: Presentation of Data

Over the course of three months, teaching was observed weekly in classrooms during literacy instruction, the teachers were interviewed on a weekly basis, documents were collected from the teachers that related to their instruction, and most school days were spent on the campus of Wayne Rogers in order to investigate how the teachers selected what to plan in their literacy block, as well as how to teach it. In the following chapter, the data that was collected and analyzed will be presented to show how teachers planned and taught literacy, with particular focus on the four main components of their instruction—an increase of text dependency, whole class instruction with the same text, an increase in the use of informational text, and the use of standards as pedagogy. Following that, the teachers' interpretations of the Common Core Standards Initiative, which had a strong influence on the way they taught literacy, will be shared.

Literacy Instruction at Wayne Rogers Elementary

The teachers at Wayne Rogers had four common features that were evident in their literacy instruction and that were reported as instructional shifts during this school year for each of the teachers. All of the teachers included a stronger focus on text dependency, an increase in the use of whole class instruction with grade level text, an increase in the use of informational text during literacy instruction, and making the standards the focus for pedagogical decisions. These same four instructional practices were also observed during each teacher's literacy instruction. Data collected as evidence of each of these four instructional practices will be presented in the following sections.

Focus on text dependent questions and answers. The teachers at Wayne Rogers focused a large part of literacy instruction around the concept of text dependency. They attributed this part of their instruction to the Common Core instructional shift dealing with text dependent questions and answers. Teachers were exposed to information on this shift at district and school trainings on Common Core. The description of this instructional shift in Common Core reads: "Teachers insist that classroom experiences stay deeply connected to the text on the page and that students develop habits for making evidentiary arguments both in conversation, as well as in writing to assess comprehension of a text" (EngageNY, 2011). This shift was incorporated into literacy instruction by the teachers in two main ways: a decrease in the encouragement of personal text connections and a decrease in the use of building background knowledge before reading.

More text dependency, less personal connections. At the heart of the teachers' interpretation of this instructional shift was less encouragement of students to make personal connections to text or talk about prior knowledge that was not directly related to the text in front of them. Maggie shared her understandings of this shift from trainings she attended through the district:

> Maggie: A lot of the trainings I've been going to have been looking at what the assessments actually are and then the Common Core needs to meet that. They say, like, all the test items ask you questions directly from the piece of text. A lot of teachers ask…the example they used was Martin Luther King's speech…the first question [teachers usually ask] may be, what is Martin Luther King feeling?

> Which is not directly in the text. So are we actually teaching kids how to read the text or form opinions from other things? And a lot of times, you know, when you introduce a piece of text, you say…this is Martin Luther King and he wrote this…and they can answer questions from what you said, not by looking at the text. So I think that's what Common Core is kind of aiming for.

Maggie's understanding about this shift, based on the information from the district, was to have students depend more on the text in front of them and less on their own personal connections to the story. The example she gave about Martin Luther King came from the David Coleman video shown at district trainings and at a faculty meeting at Wayne Rogers (PARCC, 2011), which demonstrates how the interpretations from the Common Core author, as well as from the district, shaped Maggie's own interpretations.

According to the teachers, this shift to text dependent questions is encouraged at district level professional development sessions and site level faculty meetings through teachers' presentations, as well as through viewing the Coleman video. In this video, entitled "Bringing Common Core to Life" (PARCC, 2011), David Coleman offers examples of ways to approach (and not approach) a specific piece of text. In this national level presentation, he criticizes the commonly used instructional practices of building background knowledge (Antsey & Freebody, 1987; Cunningham & Shagoury, 2005; Gregory & Cahill, 2010; Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007) and making personal connections to the text (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007; Tovani, 2000). According to Emily, "Text dependent questions is the big Common Core standard. No more asking them, how can you relate this to your own

life, or anything like that. They want it specific. The kids are pulling information from the text." Emily's interpretation is directly linked to the messages she hears at trainings about this Common Core shift. She also interprets this shift as completely pulling away from the encouragement of personal connections to stories as a comprehension strategy, which is evidenced in her words of "no more" in reference to making connections.

Nikki also remarked about the need to decrease the focus on making personal connections to the text and instead focusing on the author's intent:

> Nikki: And one thing that I'm really, have always felt very strongly about is text dependent questions. I don't care about your text to self connection, don't tell me. I don't want to know, I don't care. As a grown up reader, I use them all the time. But what good is it for a kid to make a text to self connection unless it's to aid in their own comprehension. So we'll do awareness about how do you know that…oh I know that because I've experienced something like that and can identify with the text, but it comes through in our other comprehension work. But I don't see a ton of value in it otherwise.

Nikki's statement also demonstrates her interpretation of this Common Core shift as a need to strongly pull away from allowing students to make connections between the text and their prior experience or knowledge. Her interpretation stems from messages she heard in the Coleman video (PARCC, 2011) that were now part of her literacy pedagogy. This also demonstrates how her content and pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) regarding reading comprehension and strategies for teaching students how to comprehend text was rooted in her interpretations of Common Core. Nikki's comment

that a text to self connection should only be used if it aids comprehension is evidence of a lack of understanding about the purpose of text to self connections, which *is* to aid a student's comprehension (Keene & Zimmerman, 1997). Helping students' comprehension is the purpose of including this instructional reading strategy. Nikki also frames comprehension strategies that students should use differently than the comprehension strategies she uses as an adult reader. She contradicts her own statement by showing value for the use of connections in her own reading, but devaluing it when the students use the same strategy. This is evidence both that Nikki conceptualizes reading comprehension differently for students and herself, and that focusing solely on the text is important for her students but not for an adult reader using literacy skills and strategies.

This shift to more text dependency and less personal connection could be seen during literacy instruction in many classrooms. During observations in multiple teachers' classrooms, students began to share information that they knew about a topic from previous experiences, only to be stopped by the classroom teacher and told to find the information in the text. If they could not locate the idea in the text, they were discouraged from including it in the discussion or the written task. This was observed during a lesson in Nikki's classroom when the students were reading a text about events leading up to the Revolutionary War.

> The students were all seated at their desks and were asked to recall information regarding the various groups of people who were involved in the historical events they were discussing. Students were referring back to a common text they read

> several times over the course of two weeks, as well as referring to their social studies textbook chapter. Nikki prompted the students to look at the text for specific sentences even if they could remember the information. She told the class not to rely on their memory, but instead to find pages in the textbook or reading passage that supported their idea. One student volunteered information from a text he had previously read on his own and information he recalled from his prior knowledge. Although the information was accurate, Nikki told the student that all responses had to come from the texts and that if he could not find a specific sentence to support his answer, he needed to continue looking within the text to find exact sentences that showed he was correct. As students provided responses from the text, Nikki recorded their answers on a large chart in the front of the room to refer to during later lessons in the unit.

This vignette is evidence of Nikki's strong reliance on text dependency for her literacy instruction. She frames reading comprehension as students being able to respond with information directly in the text, rather than utilizing their background knowledge or personal connections from previously read texts.

The emphasis on text dependency was seen at all grade levels, including kindergarten. Maggie spoke about being encouraged in trainings to have her students ask questions about the pictures in a book, and to have students focus specifically on questions that could be answered by reading the book. This was challenging to the six-year olds who wanted to share stories and personal adventures related to the story, and was at times in conflict with some of Maggie's own feelings about allowing the students

to talk more in class and share ideas expressively, both for social interaction and for language building. She spoke often of not having enough time to just "talk" to the students, and stated that the students at this age really needed more time to practice oral language development. Maggie felt that many of the students did not engage in rich conversations at home, so she wanted to provide more opportunities for this in her classroom. She also had several students with very limited English proficiency, and she knew that engaging in dialogue would help these students further develop their oral language and communication skills. Read aloud was previously a time where this language and communication development could naturally occur, but to Maggie, this instructional shift meant narrowing the focus of the conversation so that it was completely centered around the text.

> During one lesson, Maggie asked all the kindergarten students to gather in front of her on the carpet. She had a book selected as a read aloud. Maggie told the class she would hold the book so they could see the pictures, but that they were going to listen to someone else read the words from a cd. Before reading, Maggie asked the students questions related to the author's job and the illustrator's job, and then asked them to locate the front, back, spine, and title page of the book. She asked the class if they knew what a resolution was, as this word as in the title. When no one provided an answer, she told them it was like making a goal for themselves or a promise. Maggie proceeded to play the cd of the text being read while she held the book for students to see. She stopped every two pages to ask a literal question about the story to check the students' comprehension. Many of the questions clarified who the characters were in the story as well as an event that just occurred

> in the story plot. When the book was finished, she asked students to tell her who the main characters were and what happened in the book. One of the students started to tell a story about an experience she had that was similar to the event in the book, but Maggie drew the focus back to the text by asking what else happened in the story without asking the student to elaborate further on her connection.

This lesson was evidence that Maggie focused her read aloud instruction on the events and characters of the text being read, without elaboration or encouragement of personal connections. Some literacy experts suggest that prior to reading a story, teachers should use the strategy of having students make predictions about the text or make connections based on the title or pictures (Cunningham & Shagoury, 2005; Keene & Zimmerman, 1997; Miller, 2002). Maggie chose to focus on text dependent concepts such as identifying parts to the book or words in the title as her prereading instruction. This shows that despite her own feelings about students needing more time to use dialogue and talk about text, she narrowed her instruction to specific aspects of the text without encouraging elaboration on personal connections.

All of the teachers talked about the need to resist encouraging students to make personal connections to the text as often as they had previously done in their teaching. They stressed the importance of focusing on the actual text with students. This is evidence that the teachers relied on their interpretations of messages they received about Common Core in district trainings and in the Coleman video, rather than relying on their knowledge about their students or existing research in the field of literacy.

"Diving in" without background knowledge. Another way this shift toward text dependency was evident in the literacy instruction demonstrated by all the Wayne Rogers teachers was in a decrease of frontloading information and building background knowledge with students prior to reading a text. While many literacy experts recommend the strategy of building background knowledge to help strengthen students' reading comprehension (Alvermann & Hague, 1989; Gallagher, 2011; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007), the teachers relied on a different message that came from the Coleman video they watched and what they interpreted from the district trainings.

Nikki had a strong connection to this video, referring to her viewing of it as having a "gestalt", where everything she thought she knew about teaching reading "radically shifted in one moment". When speaking about the instructional strategies that Coleman criticizes in the video, she agreed with him, and expressed her thoughts that what educators do to children by "imposing strategies" such as frontloading, summarizing text in advance, and building vocabulary was "a crime". Her whole perspective on effective literacy instruction was impacted by her interpretation of the information in this video. Sharon and Emily also expressed strong agreement with Coleman's message in the video. The shift in thinking for all these teachers illustrates how teachers' interpretations of Common Core were significantly impacted by messages they were receiving at district trainings.

In the video, Coleman asks teachers to rethink the "popular strategy" of activating prior knowledge or building students' background knowledge before reading the text. The teachers at Wayne Rogers talked about this concept often. Several of them

mentioned needing to change their instructional approach to let students just "dive in" rather than frontloading information. Emily referenced this specifically when discussing how Common Core has changed her teaching this year:

> Emily: I was frontloading a lot more information to my lower kids [last year]. Like, frontloading vocabulary. Things like that. But Common Core doesn't really want you frontloading a lot anymore. They really just want the kids to dive in.
>
> Aimee: Does the Common Core document say that?
>
> Emily: I don't think it says that in the document.
>
> Aimee: Where does that come from?
>
> Emily: The videos. The video we watched, that's where it comes from. They don't want you frontloading a lot so I can honestly say my instruction…my guidance is different from group to group, but I'm kind of just having them all dive in now.
>
> Aimee: So you're pulling back the frontloading because of the messages in the video?
>
> Emily: Yes. Definitely. And I agree with that message.

Emily interpreted the message in the Coleman video as a need to include little to no building of background knowledge with her students before reading a story, and viewed that prereading instructional practice—which she said was a big part of her instruction prior to Common Core—as "spoonfeeding" her students. Emily recognized that the actual Common Core document does not instruct teachers to stop building background knowledge, but she still interpreted the message from the video and trainings to mean that

building background knowledge with students was not allowing students to have a rich reading experience. She talked more about this same concept on another occasion:

> Emily: I did get better at letting them dive in at first on their own, before going back and reading together.
>
> Aimee: And that idea is from…?
>
> Emily: Common Core. The Common Core makes me feel…I think before I would have felt like a bad teacher doing that. Because all the trainings that you take, it's always…scaffold, scaffold, scaffold, and frontload…. All those things that you do, especially with ESL learners. So I think last year I would have considered myself a bad teacher to just tell my lowest reading group, I just want you to dive in. Try to read this grade level text and we're going to talk about it. But this year, I feel more confident doing that because I know that Common Core wants us to be doing it. To be giving the kids more independence and putting more of the accountability on them.

In Emily's classroom, this "diving in" often consisted of giving the students text such as an assigned article in a current copy of the fourth grade level of Scholastic News (Scholastic, 2012). The students were typically directed to work with a partner, read the article, and underline or highlight information that related to comprehension questions that either came with the article or that Emily created. After they worked with their partner, their responses were reviewed either in small groups or in whole class. Therefore, Emily's interpretation of Common Core was to significantly decrease the use of prereading strategies like building background knowledge in order to have students

become more accountable and more independent. She utilized the messages she interpreted in Common Core to give her permission to take this pedagogical approach, and to alleviate her feelings of being a "bad teacher" for using this approach.

Other teachers echoed these sentiments about no longer frontloading information or building background knowledge because of their interpretation of the message in the Coleman videos. Nikki spoke a lot about the Coleman video and its impact on her teaching, but specifically referenced the idea of frontloading. When talking about presenting a Common Core exemplar lesson that was given to her by the district, she said, "What I can't do is preteach it. Because that would be the frontloading. The frontloading part that stops them from a genuine reading experience."

> This shift to "diving in" was observed during one afternoon when Nikki taught one of the Common Core exemplar lessons she received from a district professional development session. The students were asked to read a poem describing two different statues. The whole class chorally read the entire poem straight through. When they were finished, Nikki asked them to read the first eight lines again chorally. Prior to this, the students' only discussion of the poem was about the rhyme scheme. They did not discuss the content of the passage. After reading those introductory lines chorally twice, the students were asked to silently reread them a third time. Nikki asked the students to think about what statues were being described in the poem using only information from the text. A student began to offer a story about New York City to reference when inferring that the one statue in the poem was the Statue of Liberty. Nikki stopped the

student and reminded the class to focus only on the words in the text to support their thinking.

During the follow up interview, Nikki explained that all the frontloading teachers do with text would be similar to someone summarizing a movie for another person before they went to see it, which is an explanation Coleman shared in his video (PARCC, 2011). She did not allow herself to provide any background information or provide a context for the poem the students read because she felt that it would ruin the reading experience for the students if she offered too much information prior to reading. She explained her reasoning for using this instructional approach using phrases and arguments directly from the video. During the lesson previously described, Nikki felt that the students in her class had a richer reading experience because they were not given a context for the poem they read and were forced to rely on the words in the poem to construct meaning. Nikki was observed on another occasion beginning to provide background context to the class for the passage they were going to read, but she stopped herself. She remarked that it was habit to provide that background context, but was something she could not allow herself to do anymore. Therefore, Nikki's pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) was framed by her interpretation of the messages in the video she saw.

Fran had a different thought on this issue, however. After attending three district classes on Common Core and seeing the Coleman video twice, she felt the message about eliminating preteaching or building background knowledge was not always appropriate. She admitted that she would try to let the kids dive in at times, since that was what Common Core seemed to want, but that if it was a complicated text that required prior

knowledge to be able to attempt to comprehend it, she would not hesitate to preteach that to her students—whether it was vocabulary or the historical context of a story. Fran's use of her own content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) regarding reading comprehension, in connection with her understanding of the messages from the district, created a slightly different interpretation of how prereading strategies would look in her classroom.

"Diving in" was an understanding that most of the teachers at Wayne Rogers had about the expectations of Common Core. To the teachers, this diving in meant little to no time spent on prereading strategies like building background knowledge with students or time for students to share their personal connections to the text. The teachers did not discuss using any content knowledge or pedagogical content knowledge related to research on reading comprehension strategies, but rather utilized this interpretation of the Common Core and the Coleman video as the reason for changing their literacy instruction.

Text dependency and assessments. The upper grade teachers tied the text dependency shift to preparation for the standardized assessments on several occasions. Fran, Lauren, and Emily were all observed pulling activities into class, such as highlighting details in the text or numbering parts of the text that answered a question, as a way to use text dependency to also help students with test taking strategies.

> In one lesson that Lauren implemented with sixth grade students, she gave the students a constructed response question that came with the story she was using from the online Reading A-Z program (Learning a-z, n.d.). The question had two parts, so she asked the students to locate the first part of the question and mark it

> with a capital A. Then the students were asked to find the second part to the question and label it with a capital B. Before the students began writing a response to the question, they were asked to write “A” and “B” on the answer lines and separate their response to match the parts to the question.

Lauren talked about this lesson during the weekly interview. She admitted that a large part of her work with her students involved test preparation strategies. She expressed feeling pressured because the special education population was often “the reason the school did not make AYP”, despite feeling this was an unrealistic expectation in the case of several of her students. She also expressed that if it were not for the standardized tests, she would not teach these strategies to her students because she felt they were not relevant or developmentally appropriate. Nevertheless, they were a regular part of her instruction:

> Lauren:[The students] have to do it on the tests. I keep explaining to them that we’re not the ones grading it, it will be someone else. So you’ve got to tell them what you’re trying to say. And I teach them to label A or B or C so they know which part you are answering. I also am teaching them to write in complete sentences, and to answer the question. It’s hard. They don’t know what to do, or they answer one part, not the whole thing. And I’m just like… (sighs).

Lauren felt strongly that the grade level statewide tests were extremely challenging for her special education students, who were typically reading several years below their grade level. However, she expressed on multiple occasions that the special education population was the cause in many years for schools not making Adequate Yearly

Progress, so she worked hard on test taking strategies with her students. Her focus was related to the Common Core notion of text dependency in that the students needed to focus on answering questions with information directly from the text in order to do well on the end of the year assessments.

Emily often used the shift to text dependent questions and answers as a way to incorporate test taking skills in her classroom. She spoke about using this type of lesson regularly because the students really needed to work on this.

> Emily: They just need a lot of…you have to have them go back in and see where you can find the answer. So in this paragraph, where can you find a specific example of that? The questioning has to be really specific. And teaching them to go back in and look. I don't think they have those skills down independently yet. It's like they just sit there and try to bring it out of their brains. And it's like, you don't have to do that! It's right there. So I teach them to go back in. Lots of highlighting.

Emily, as well as other teachers at Wayne Rogers, interpreted the emphasis on text dependency as a way to increase student performance on assessments. In their view, if students were focused on the details of the text in front of them, and not on their own connections to the text, they would be able to respond more accurately to questions about that text in an assessment situation. Therefore, the Common Core shift focusing on text dependency reinforced the teachers' need to prepare their students for the standardized reading assessments that rely on answering questions based solely on the text.

Assessments were often on the mind of teachers at Wayne Rogers Elementary. Sharing assessment data with grade levels and across the school was a common practice. When the standardized test scores were released to the teachers, results of individual classes were posted for all teachers to view and were discussed at faculty meetings. Fran shared that when test results came back, the teachers sat at Professional Learning Communities and were expected to "find out what other teachers whose students had higher performance were doing differently, or doing better than what they were doing in their own classrooms." Emily also spoke about the sharing of data when the previous year's scores were posted.

> Emily: And I was really upset because those scores went up in front of the entire school. And I felt really bad.
>
> Aimee: So they are posted and talked about at staff meetings?
>
> Emily: Yeah. They just put them up in the end of the year, class by class and we just talk about it. Like, at staff meetings and stuff. And we just talk about how the kids do. And so this year I had 50% of my kids come in a grade level or two below. And I just remember thinking…oh my gosh. If these kids don't pass, it's going to look bad going up.

The pressure the teachers expressed made them rely even more on instructional approaches such as text dependent questioning. Emily talked about teaching a critical literacy based unit on bullying during the previous school year. Despite feeling like it was a tremendous experience for her students, she expressed that she would never teach a unit like that again because "their test scores plummeted".

> Emily: I would definitely say I wouldn't include it because of the test scores…..It took up a lot of time during the day. Looking back through my plan book, we would spend a lot of the day doing it. I wasn't doing a lot of the word study, word analysis, prefixes…you know, all of those types of things that they're going to get tested on. Context clues. We'd spent so much time [earlier in] the year on that so I wasn't worried. And the [critical literacy] project was a lot of them doing their own research, gathering information, writing skits…it was things like that. It was a different type of literacy. Not the tested type. So when they went to take that test…(shook her head). We were no longer doing the underline details, answer comprehension questions type of literacy practice.

Despite positive impacts on students during the critical literacy unit in the prior school year, Emily decided not to teach that unit to future classes because of the resulting test scores. She knew the students were not tested on the types of activities that were included in the critical literacy unit; therefore, those activities were valued less by Emily in the classroom. Emily's concern over test scores was seen in her heavy reliance on the activities like text dependent questioning and reduction of responses not directly related to the text in both her planning and instruction. She interpreted the purpose of her literacy instruction to be getting students ready to perform on the standardized assessments, and a way to help accomplish this goal was to teach her students to focus directly on the text in front of them.

The focus on test preparation was evident at the district level. The district level administrator who was a secondary informant in the study also spoke about the district

selecting the text dependency shift to emphasize districtwide. With higher performance on the standardized tests a guiding goal, this shift would encourage teachers to emphasize those text-based skills that would help students perform on the various types of questions they would eventually encounter on the state assessment.

Shifting to the reliance on the text to respond to questions was a big focus for the teachers at Wayne Rogers, and was mentioned often in interviews as well as observed during instruction. The main way this shift was interpreted by teachers was to no longer encourage students to make personal connections to text or to build background knowledge before reading. Again, this was a shift that the district incorporated into their implementation of Common Core and the professional development offered to teachers. While many literacy scholars hold the use of personal connections as a valuable comprehension strategy (Anderson & Pearson, 1984; Antsey & Freebody, 1987; Cunningham & Shagoury, 2005; Gallagher, 2011; Keene & Zimmerman, 2007), the teachers at Wayne Rogers interpreted the use of personal connections as a distraction from focusing on the text that was being used for the lesson. Teachers referenced the district's message about the importance of this shift to text dependency several times throughout the study, demonstrating how the teachers' literacy instruction was shaped by their interpretations of Common Core.

Same text for the whole class. All of the teachers at Wayne Rogers Elementary that were part of the study used whole class instruction and grade level text more than they had at the beginning of the school year. They attributed this to one of the instructional shifts involved with Common Core, which is a staircase of text complexity.

The EngageNY website (EngageNY, 2011), which is sometimes used in trainings by the school district, worded this shift as:

> In order to prepare students for the complexity of college and career ready texts, each grade level requires a 'step' of growth on the 'staircase'. Students read the central, grade appropriate text around which instruction is centered. Teachers are patient, create more time and space in the curriculum for this close and careful reading, and provide appropriate and necessary scaffolding and supports so that it is possible for students reading below grade level. (p.1)

This is also one of the shifts that the school district in this study emphasized during their professional development for teachers. The influence of this Common Core shift in the teachers' instruction was evident through the use of grade appropriate text with all students for the majority of the school day, along with an increase in whole class reading instruction.

Several of the teachers referenced the Common Core text complexity shift as a reason for using grade level text during reading instruction much more frequently and less text at the students' instructional reading levels, which was a pedagogical shift for all of the teachers. The texts used by the teachers varied, but often included the Houghton Mifflin selections (Houghton Mifflin, 2005), the science or social studies textbook adopted by the district, and selections from the Reading A to Z program (Learning A-Z, n.d.). Two teachers switched almost exclusively to grade level text with all students all the time—with the exception of the instruction that took place during the school's reading intervention time three days a week. Emily and Nikki firmly stated that using

grade level text with all students was crucial to having those students who were reading below grade level begin to read higher level texts. Rather than gradually increasing the complexity of text, their interpretation of this Common Core shift was to go directly to the use of grade level text with all students and, according to the teachers, differentiate instruction through their level of support. This differentiation at times included stopping more often in a passage to summarize what was happening in the text or to complete a graphic organizer, or at other times it meant reading the passage to the students several times. Emily spoke about her decision to use grade level text for the remainder of the year with all her students:

> Emily: I went to another teacher and said, what do you think about me using the fourth grade social studies book with my lowest readers….She was like, absolutely! They have to read fourth grade text….So I started that this week. I'm using the fourth grade social studies textbook and I'm going to make them read grade level text for the rest of the year. They get all that differentiated stuff in their [reading] intervention groups. They have to be pushed.

In these statements, Emily shows that before moving to grade level text with her whole class, she sought validation from another teacher at the school (this teacher was previously the instructional coach at the school). She combined the advice of the other teacher with the messages she interpreted from Common Core to make the decision to have all of her students read fourth grade level text, despite a comment during an interview that "50% of the class is reading two grade levels behind". Her interpretation of

"needing to push" the students was to use the grade level content area textbook for all future literacy instruction.

Emily spoke about the shift to grade level text in her classroom on another occasion as well:

> Aimee: So why do you think you're making that change [to more grade level text] this year?
>
> Emily: Um….I do believe in differentiated groups. But sometimes we differentiate so much though that they don't get enough of the content at the actual grade level. And I know for myself being a grad student that I've had classes where I've had reading materials thrown at me and I was forced to make sense out of it. And I had to use every skill I had in place to make sense out of that text in order to survive. And I think if we start teaching them to do that now and we give them the confidence to do that now…it won't be as scary when they get…because they're going to have to do it in high school. They're no longer going to give them textbooks at their level in high school. Everybody gets the same book. So if we start building that confidence now, that we're all reading the same text. And it might be hard but you're going to try to make meaning out of it. I think it's going to be better off. Be better for them later on.
>
> Aimee: Can you link that thought process to anything? Is there anything that you think shaped your thinking on that?
>
> Emily: Common Core. Common Core is really big on text complexity right now, too. A lot of our professional development. Like another teacher is taking one of

> the classes. And we've seen videos of people who came up with the Common Core speaking. And they just don't want you to spoon feed anymore. Common Core basically wants you to take…they don't want you to take really long texts that you're going to be worried about getting from start to finish. They want you to take short, concise things that are difficult for students to understand and really dive in to the depth of what they're reading. And to force kids to use the skills that they have to make meaning out of what they're given without being spoon fed vocabulary…and I still do that a little. When I know, when I can prejudge words that I know will be really difficult. Especially in nonfiction. Usually I'll pick those words out. But they want a lot less spoon feeding. They want kids to dive in and to start, yeah. So it was a mixture, but mostly Common Core.

Many scholars in the field of literacy agree that students should be challenged with text in order to have opportunities to practice reading strategies, but this challenge should be gradual and the level of text should allow for a high level of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension (Allington, 2002; Fountas & Pinnell, 1999). Emily interpreted this shift as a need to go directly to teaching with grade appropriate text for all students, no matter what their instructional reading level currently was, and despite many students in her class reading one or more years below grade level. As a result of this decision, students in Emily's class spent instructional time reading chapters in small groups or with partners from the fourth grade social studies textbook. They also read articles from Scholastic News (Scholastic, 2012) each week that were at a fourth grade reading level. Some of the students read these materials with Emily in small groups using popcorn style reading,

while others read them with an instructional aide or with one partner from the classroom. They monitored their comprehension with the use of graphic organizers that Emily created based off of the Common Core standards she chose to focus on that week.

There was an increase in whole class instruction for all the teachers as a result of this shift to the same text for all students in almost every classroom. Some teachers went from using whole class reading instruction once or twice a week to using it for an hour or more every day of the week. When discussing the reason for this, the teachers felt that it was more logical to teach everyone together if they were all using the same text, which would provide an opportunity for all students to participate in a classwide discussion about the common text.

> Nikki was using a lot more whole class instruction by the end of this study. On one afternoon, she asked all of her students at their desks to take out their social studies textbooks as well as their copy of an informational text they all had previously read twice. For eight weeks, Nikki's class had been studying the American Revolution and their texts for literacy instruction were the same texts used for the social studies content. Nikki asked the students to use their textbook and the other informational book to find facts about the Battle of Lexington and Concord. As a whole class, the students began to look through their text, reading sentences that they believed were facts about the battle. Nikki asked several students to clarify what the specific fact was in the sentence they read. During this time, many students were paging through their social studies textbook and other text looking for facts, while other students talked to classmates or sat with their books closed. Approximately one third of the students replied to Nikki's

> request for facts about the battle while the rest did not offer any responses. The entire 35 minute lesson was done with the whole group.

Nikki spoke about this lesson and her reasons for selecting whole class instruction during an interview that followed:

> Aimee: I know that early on [in the semester] you said you did whole class maybe about once a week…
>
> Nikki: A lot more now. A lot more.
>
> Aimee: Why do you think that is?
>
> Nikki: Because I don't see the point of working in small groups right now. They have small groups at their tables. We're all dealing with the same material. We've all read it numerous times together. They've heard me read it. They've read it together. So we are discussing. When we are discussing, why would I want to rob a struggling reader of a discussion that can be enriched by all of us.
>
> Aimee: So if you are using a common text, then it seems...
>
> Nikki: I'm using a common text, so I don't see a point of breaking into smaller groups.

Nikki was regularly using the same text for all of her students, typically through the close reading model shared at the district Common Core trainings, where she read the text to her students, sometimes three to four times, after they read it to themselves. Since she was using the same lesson plan for all the students, she stated that it was more logical to implement the lesson whole class. On a few occasions, Nikki was seen working with smaller groups of students. However, even when she separated students into groups, they were all using the same basic lesson plan and the same grade level text. This shows that Nikki framed her literacy instruction around discussions, and did not require students to

be able to read the text used during literacy time. The text was read aloud, and students were able to access the meaning of the text through whole class discussions, despite only a portion of the class contributing to the discussion.

Sharon also spoke about an increase in the use of whole class instruction in her classroom from the beginning of the year until the time of the study. After she brought up using more whole class instruction, she speculated about the reason for it:

> Aimee : So why do you think that more whole class is happening?
>
> Sharon: Well, if you think back, let's say forty years ago, they used to teach the classics. All the kids read the classics. No one had an abridged version or a simplified version. What I learned from Common Core is that the last forty years we have… to have those kids gain access to that text, we decided that kids should have a summarized version that does not have the language or the cadence or rhythm or feel of the original text. But that's how they could get to that text. They needed help. Obviously it hasn't worked in our system because we are doing so poorly internationally. Now they are going back and taking that original text so that kids…this is the writer of Common Core, I saw a video on him….so that we can, those kids, even ELLs and lower performers, can access the real text and understand what the goals of the author were, the language, all that part that goes into the language.

Sharon interpreted the Common Core text complexity shift as a return to what she believed classrooms were like decades ago, with all students reading the same text at the same level. She framed her understanding of this idea using information from the

Coleman video (PARCC, 2011) that was shared with her during a district training. This shift became the base of her knowledge regarding literacy instruction, but she did not speak about how the students who were reading below grade level would be able to access this text—only that they *should* access it.

Nikki also expressed movement away from the use of leveled text in her classroom:

> Nikki: I've never sat around remediating any group of students. I just, sometimes alter the level of the text they are in. And now I'm [expletive] canning that, if I'm being honest. I run our tier three reading group for intervention. They've been reading fifth grade text for weeks now. It's not that they can't word call it. It's that they don't have the structures in place in their brain for keeping track of complex text.

Nikki utilized the social studies textbook with her fifth graders for some of her literacy instruction, and was not seen during observation times using text with her students at lower than a fifth grade level. She felt strongly that leveling the text was the reason students did not close the achievement gap. She defined differentiation in her reading block as varying the level of support she gave students, rather than varying the level of text. The fact that she used grade level text even with the most struggling readers in the intervention group shows Nikki's strong shift to having all students utilize the same text during literacy instruction.

All of the teachers were observed using more whole class instruction throughout the course of the study, and they all talked about using this approach significantly more since the beginning of the school year. The two most frequent instructional approaches

to giving the class access to this same text at grade level was through repeated readings with read aloud, and through round robin or popcorn style reading.

Repeated readings with teacher read aloud. One of the instructional strategies utilized by the teachers at Wayne Rogers while teaching with grade level text for all students was the use of repeated readings combined with reading the text aloud to the students. The teachers shared that they received the idea for this model from a video created by Common Core co-author David Coleman (PARCC, 2011). The instructional approach in Coleman's video involved the idea of "close reading" and multiple readings of the same text over several days. Specifically, Coleman suggested the strategy of having the students read the passage once on their own then having the teacher read the passage aloud to the students. If necessary, this strategy was to be repeated multiple times for "close reading" of the text. This represents a shift from literacy practices recommended by researchers that students need to spend a large portion of their day reading text that they can access with a high percentage of accuracy, fluency, and comprehension through guided instruction with their teacher (Allington, 2002; Clay, 1993; Fountas & Pinnell, 1999).

Nikki frequently used this pedagogical approach for her literacy instruction. Her use of the same grade level text for the whole class was observed on five separate occasions.

> During one lesson, which was the only time during the school year that Nikki utilized the Houghton Mifflin book for literacy instruction, Nikki asked all of her fifth graders to come to the rug with a reading book. There was a one-page informational piece related to the historical fiction story they were preparing to

> read. Nikki asked the whole class to chorally read the informational passage. When they finished, she clarified the meaning of one of the words in the passage. They were then asked to turn to the story in the reading book. She reminded them that they would be asking questions about the story. Nikki then read the first page of the story out loud to the class. She asked them to write down a question they had in their journals. Next, she read the same page aloud to them a second time and again asked them to write down questions they had. She told them it was a difficult passage, so she was going to read it to them a third time so that they understood it. After reading the page aloud to the class a third time, she asked them to record questions in their journals and wrote her own question on a sticky note which was placed on the document camera screen so it was visible to the class. Nikki repeated this process with the next page of the story, reading it aloud three times. After the second page was read aloud for the third time, she told the students they could either leave the group and read each page twice in a group of two or three students, or they could stay on the rug with her and continue to have it read to them. Approximately half the class elected to leave the group and read with someone else. Nikki continued the procedure of reading each page aloud to the remaining students three times while they recorded questions while the rest of the class read with a partner or group of three.

In a follow up interview, Nikki spoke about her decision to use this instructional model with the whole class:

Aimee: So how did you decide to read it to them three times? I know sometimes you do I read it, you read it. But this time you read it aloud either two or three times. So I was wondering what made you choose this way.

Nikki: I want them to have a supported reading so they could focus on their comprehension issues. I don't want them asking me a question about a word they can't decode. I want them to ask a question about a word they don't know.

Aimee: So listening comprehension is equally…

Nikki; Well, my listening vocabulary is where I'm really learning, you know. What I can decode…I'm not interested in word attack right now. I'm interested in what they can comprehend. So I let these other groups come back because I figured they'd have, they felt comfortable that their decoding wouldn't interfere. And I chose to read it three times…you know how there's those little bits you just hang on to? One things I've always hung on to is this stupid reading…um…the Reading Panel report [National Reading Panel, 2000] is the literature on fluency. That basically says the more you read, the more fluent you become, the more you understand. And that nobody understands something probably the first time they read it. We talk about it all the time. Every class I have every year, we talk about fluency and repeated reading and why that's an important thing we do for ourselves. So I know that for myself, and we've kept track of it for us, that we build our comprehension in little chunks. You know. Start with a little chunk and the second my comprehension breaks down, I'm unlikely to get it back and so I've dealt with that problem. Or I'm not going to have a complete understanding

> of the story because you can't presume that paragraph didn't matter. So even if you have gorgeous understanding, then a hole, then more gorgeous understanding…that hole could be the difference between thinking the main character is Alice or Dixie.
>
> Aimee: How much time would you say they spend working on comprehension through listening to something read to them versus when they're doing the reading all on their own, if that makes sense?
>
> Nikki: I have them reading to self every day for about a half an hour. And they keep track of their comprehension of that through the reading slip that I give them. So that's sort of how I monitor what they're doing during their read to self time. When we're dealing with a whole class text, I'm not….I have kids who can read at a first grade level in here and I've got kids who can read up to tenth grade level in here. I will never fool myself and pretend they can all handle a text independently. So if I want to use it for whole class instruction, I'm not going to spend a bunch of time having them read independently.

Nikki's interpretation of the need to use increasingly complex text was to have all of her students listen to grade level text read aloud multiple times. She chose to use repeated readings based on her understanding of the close reading model she viewed in the Coleman video (PARCC, 2011) during school district trainings. Nikki spoke about this model and the video on several occasions, and clearly stated that these trainings and this video impacted her instructional approach. In this way, Nikki took the information from the video about the model of close reading and it became a significant part of her

pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). She used this strategy as a direct result of her trainings with the district. Her instructional response to the use of more complex text with her whole class was to read to the students several times in order to provide them with the information in the text they could not read themselves. The story that was used in the vignette above was still being read by the class three weeks later, showing that Nikki spent considerable time rereading the same passage with her students.

Nikki embraced this strategy of close reading for her whole class instruction, using it at times in small group reading lessons and often in whole class instruction, with stories from Readinga-z.com (Learning A-Z, n.d.), as well as a selection from Houghton Mifflin (Houghton Mifflin, 2005) and chapters from the district social studies textbook. She referenced this strategy on another occasion, when she had students read once followed by reading it aloud to them:

> Nikki: We're always doing the double exposure—once by themselves and once where I read it to them.
>
> Aimee: And how did you choose that approach?
>
> Nikki: Because it's the model we've been using in the Common Core Task Project lessons.

This is an example of how Nikki uses the message in the Coleman video to frame her instruction. Her pedagogical content knowledge involves the approaches suggested in the videos. She uses this approach during whole class instruction, as well as small group lessons. Her explicit statement that she chose the instructional approach because of the

Common Core trainings demonstrates the substantial impact the trainings have on the instruction taking place in Nikki's classroom.

Fran also demonstrated her interpretation of this model of repeated reading with whole class instruction of the same text when she implemented a "model lesson" she received at a district training on the Common Core. The lesson consisted of an excerpt from the novel *Because of Winn-Dixie* (DiCamillo, 2001) with accompanying comprehension questions and a written task, which was written as a third grade lesson. Fran implemented the lesson in her classroom using the "close reading" model recommended in the Coleman video—the students read the passage silently, then the teacher immediately read the passage aloud to them. The passage for this lesson was approximately two and a half pages long. Students were given about fifteen to twenty minutes to read, during which time some students appeared to be focused on the text while others looked around the room or expressed vocally that the story was "too hard". Fran immediately followed the students' silent reading by reading the passage aloud to the class. During a subsequent interview, Fran expressed "liking the lesson", but feeling like it was a "bit much and a bit long":

> Fran: I thought it was a good lesson. I like that excerpt that they picked because it didn't require a lot of background building. I think most kids know what a library is and a dog is and stuff like that. So I thought that was really good. I thought the questions were good. They build up to deeper [depth of knowledge] levels. So I think that is really good. I think it might be a little too much for third grade…it's just too long.

Aimee: So the length of the lesson is too much?

Fran: I think the length of the lesson. Having to read through it twice before you even start on the questions. Maybe the number of questions…. It just seems a little much. So I don't know if I would shorten it or if I would, you know, stretch it out more like over a week or something. I don't know what I would do differently yet. But something. It was just a little much. It's a little long and a little ….boring.

Fran implemented the lesson from the district training exactly how it was presented to her at the actual training. She expressed contradictory thoughts about the lesson, stating that the story was engaging for the students and the level of questioning was appropriate, but that the length of time required for teaching this lesson to the depth that was intended seemed too overwhelming for both her and her students. Her interpretation of the Common Core lesson was that she should spend more time on the same text, allowing for multiple readings for students to develop a stronger understanding of the text. Her understanding was that she should implement the lesson exactly how it was written, as that was the intent of the district and of Common Core. This demonstrates how Fran's interpretations of Common Core were directly related to the messages she heard in district trainings.

Emily used the same model lesson that Fran used one afternoon with her whole class of fourth graders.

Emily implemented the lesson in the exact manner that was suggested by the school district. At the start of the lesson, Emily passed out copies of the excerpt from the story *Because of Winn Dixie* (DiCamillo, 2000) and told her students

they could all read the text. She said after they read it, she would read it to them. Several students groaned, but most began to read the passage. One student, after skimming the beginning of the story, remarked, “This is not interesting to me at all!” Emily said they all needed to read it anyway. Two other students said it was too difficult. Emily told the whole class that it was not too difficult because it was a fourth grade text, and that they could read it and should take pride in their work. She told them she would give them seven minutes to read the two and a half page story, but would give more time if they needed it. Most of the students began to read through the passage, while others shuffled the papers, looked around the room at classmates, or sat in their chair waiting for the next activity. After ten minutes, Emily asked if anyone needed more time. The majority of the class raised their hands, so they were given three more minutes. Emily stopped the class at that point, while several students remarked they were not finished. She told them she was going to read the story aloud to them now, which was the model suggested in the Coleman video (PARCC, 2011) that was shown at a school staff meeting. Over the next twelve minutes, the students listened to Emily reread the story aloud to them, while some students followed along in their own text. After the read aloud, the students were given questions that accompanied the story. Emily asked the students to look for evidence in the text to answer the first question, “Why was Miss Franny so scared by Winn-Dixie? Why was she ‘acting all embarrassed’? Emily then called on a student to read the first paragraph aloud, which was the third reading of this part of the story. She asked students to highlight parts of that paragraph that answered the question about why the

character was scared. One student responded to the question by making an inference that was not directly stated in the text. Emily told the student that there were better answers that focused on the words in the story. When a student provided the response Emily was looking for, she wrote the response to the question on the board and told students to copy the answer on their papers.

During the debriefing interview that week, Emily spoke about her conflicting thoughts on the lesson implementation:

> Emily: I mean, I like it because I think it dives really deep into the text.
>
> Aimee: What parts of it, specifically, were the digging deeper part?
>
> Emily: Well, what I liked about the questioning…I like that they're text specific questions. Because I think a lot of times as teachers, we kind of go off on those tangents, like how can you relate this to your own life? What other book does it make you think of? We're asking them to make all these connections and I think sometimes we fail to have them actually get their ideas from the text that they are reading. We're always asking them to pull it from somewhere else. So I do like that it's forcing them to do that because that's what they're going to do in college….. So I do, I love the lesson. However, I think it's sometimes just a lot. The passage was long. They (Common Core) want you to do that whole thing in two days. I'm going on day three. It's a long time for them to sit there. I liked the passage itself and they do because they've seen the movie and some have read the book already. This lesson I think went well…for those reasons. But had it been

> something more difficult, it might have…I mean, some of the kids after an hour were like, we're kind of bored with this.

Emily drew several conclusions about the sample lesson that showed how she interpreted what Common Core lessons should look like in the classroom. Her comments about the importance of pulling back from making connections were evidence of the way she understood the instructional shifts that dealt with text dependency. The close reading model of reading it twice caused many students to vocalize their disinterest in the lesson. There was evidence that the students who were able to read the passage on their own grew bored when Emily reread it. They were not attentive to the text and began to talk to other students. These same behaviors were seen by students who struggled reading this level of text during the first reading, when they were asked to read it independently. However, Emily did not talk about noticing these behaviors in the students, aside from the remark that some of the students found it boring. Her understanding of this lesson was that it was a model lesson, and should be implemented in the way that the lesson plan described. Therefore, Emily expressed willingness to have more lessons like this to implement in her classroom.

This model of repeated readings with a read aloud was also used during small group instruction with grade level text. Some of the teachers occasionally broke the class into smaller groups, although all the groups were reading the same text.

> During a lesson in Nikki's classroom, the students were introduced to an informational text from the Reading A-Z program that focused on the history of the American Revolution. Although she introduced the book in small groups, the entire class was reading the same text, which was at a fifth grade reading level.

> Nikki told the group they would be reading the text twice—once they would read it alone and once she would read it to them. She asked the students if they preferred to read it in chunks, or read the entire chapter. They elected to read the entire chapter, and began reading silently while Nikki paged through the book herself. When the students finished reading the pages silently, Nikki immediately read the chapter aloud to them, stopping three times during the read aloud to ask a clarification question related to vocabulary. She also told them their big question for the week was to determine who the four main groups were that were associated with the French and Indian War, which was the focus of this piece of text.

In the follow up interview after this lesson, Nikki stated that her ultimate goal for this literacy lesson was for students to understand the social studies content. When asked why she made the decision to use the repeated reading model, she said that was her primary focus due to the work she was doing with the district Common Core task force, and acknowledged the Coleman video again. Nikki's interpretation of the district message regarding text complexity was to use grade level text with all of her students, and that reading it aloud to the students frequently was the best way to ensure comprehension for her whole class.

Overall, the teachers were relying on the messages they received from watching the Coleman video, as well as their interpretations of the Common Core from the district trainings. There was not clear evidence that the teachers had an expansive content knowledge base or pedagogical content knowledge base for literacy instruction outside of

the instructional approaches they implemented from the video and their Common Core interpretations.

Grade level text and round robin reading. With an increased use of grade level text for all students during whole class reading instruction came the need for teachers at Wayne Rogers to make decisions on an instructional approach to these texts. The most commonly observed strategy other than the previously mentioned "close repeated reading" was the use of round robin or popcorn style reading. Round robin reading involves students being called on one after another to read orally to the class (Harris & Hodges, 1995) and its variation, "popcorn reading" (Ash, Kuhn, & Walpole, 2009), is the practice of having students read in a random order, with the teacher or sometimes the students stopping the oral reading to call on a new reader.

> During one lesson, Sharon was observed using round robin style reading with her whole class of first graders while reading a passage in the grade level reading series. Since the students chorally read the story earlier in the week and heard it read aloud to them, Sharon decided to take the round robin oral reading approach. Beginning with the student sitting in the first desk in the back row, each student read one sentence out loud from the story. If a student struggled to decode the words, Sharon read the sentence word by word, asking the students to repeat the word immediately after she said it. One student appeared to be extremely frustrated, putting his head down and looking visibly upset while struggling to read the sentence. He echoed each word that Sharon read aloud to him, and put his head down after his sentence was finished. This process of each student reading one sentence continued until the story was finished.

In an interview that followed this lesson, Sharon spoke about her use of round robin reading for the first time and what her reactions were to it:

> Sharon: You noticed that the kids that could not read, they just…echo read with me. Ok. But I did not stop the flow of my lesson. I kept my lesson to the standard. Which is the reading standard. And the kids at grade level were able to read that text. There were only two of them who are actually reading at grade level. The rest can't. So I decided to go with giving them support that they needed. But keeping the expectation that they were going to read aloud to the rest of the class. And I think it gives kids extra self-confidence because a lot of kids are scared to [read aloud]... But I purposely stayed up front because I want to stick with that high standard of them being able to read complex texts. That's a big deal in the new Common Core. My kids, if they're reading at a level of cat, hat, sat….I cannot let them only read that text. I have to give them complex text at their grade level. Big big part of Common Core. That means they're going to read stuff that they can't read. Now that is like an oxymoron. But it's what we need to do for Common Core. …So my teaching is improving, and I'm going to the next level, because the Common Core is giving me confidence that they're able to do it. Because there are people who put them together and they know first graders.

Sharon interpreted the use of round robin as a way to have students be successful with the grade level text. During the lesson, the majority of the class struggled with reading their sentence aloud, and Sharon confirmed that only two of her students were reading at the first grade level. Sharon defaulted to word by word echo reading. One of

the students was visibly frustrated and upset when it was his turn to read, but Sharon felt this strategy was a way to boost the students' self confidence. She saw the round robin approach as an improvement in her teaching, and interpreted Common Core and the instructional shift focused on text complexity as a reason to use methods like round robin for students to gain access to grade level text.

Emily was observed using the variation of round robin reading known as popcorn reading during five separate lessons. She used it in small groups as a way for students to have access to grade level text.

> One student in the group began reading a paragraph out loud, and when he or she reached the end of the paragraph, another student was called on to read. When students were not reading aloud, they were either following along in their text, or were off task, looking around the room or playing with their papers. When one student was called on to read and did not know where to start, Emily showed him the place in his text.

During the follow up interview that week, Emily talked about her reasons for using popcorn reading with her students:

> Emily: That's what gets them the most engaged. Don't know why they like that popcorn reading so much but they do. When we would all read it out loud, like chorally read it, or silent read it…I don't know. They're not into it as much. I feel like with the popcorn, they have to be following along because they have to know where we're at if they get popcorn. And that thrill of, am I going to get to read next. It's almost like a round robin type of reading. They love it. So I let them

> popcorn read every time because I feel like they're actually in the book when we popcorn read.

Nikki, Emily, Sharon, and Lauren were all observed used popcorn or round robin style reading in their literacy instruction. These strategies resulted in students reading small portions of the text while their classmates orally read the parts they were not asked to read themselves. The teachers interpreted the strategy of popcorn reading as one that increased student engagement in the classroom, despite observations of the students losing their place in the story or attending to other tasks while the popcorn reading was taking place, as well as contradictory research that suggests round robin style reading is an ineffective instructional practice (Ash, Kuhn, & Walpole, 2009; Opitz & Rasinski, 1998).

The focus on the shift regarding text complexity was seen in classrooms and talked about in interviews many times throughout the study. The teachers received messages regarding text complexity through videos and presentations at trainings, and began to implement the shift through the use of grade appropriate text during whole class instruction. While half of the teachers in the study continued to use small group leveled reading, all of the teachers used more whole class instruction as well as increased use of grade level text with their students. The Common Core shift became the basis of the pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) for teachers at Wayne Rogers. The teachers did not express content knowledge related to a continuum of students' reading development (International Reading Association, 2010), nor did they speak about a variety of strategies and materials they could use to meet the diverse instructional needs

of their students (Clay, 1993; Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). Instead, they framed their pedagogical content knowledge through this instructional shift.

The increased use of informational text. Another instructional shift that was referenced often and frequently observed in relation to the planning and teaching at Wayne Rogers Elementary was a shift to a balance of informational text and literary text. The instructional shift through Common Core is written as: “Students read a true balance of informational and literary texts. Elementary school classrooms are, therefore, places where students access the world – science, social studies, the arts and literature – through text. At least 50% of what students read is informational.” (EngageNY, 2011). Within the Common Core standards document itself, there is a table showing that by fourth grade, 50% of the text students read should be informational, with this number increasing as students reach higher grade levels (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). This particular shift was selected by the principal of Wayne Rogers Elementary as one for all teachers in the school to focus on throughout the school year.

Maggie, a kindergarten teacher, spoke about this particular shift when referencing the differences between old state standards and the new Common Core standards, and shared her reasons for agreeing with this shift:

> Maggie: They [Common Core] added a lot of informational text. I like the informational text they added. Expecting that to be 50%. I think that’s really important.
>
> Aimee: Why?

> Maggie: Because most of the reading after high school, most of what you read, and when you're an adult, is informational text. So I think by just reading stories we are doing a disservice to our kids. Even though it's really fun to read stories.

Maggie's interpretation of Common Core was that students needed to encounter a larger amount of informational text, even in kindergarten, because of the amount of informational text most adults typically read. She expresses her own value of narrative stories by commenting on it being "fun" to read these; however, the message she understood from the district and Common Core was that the need to read informational text was more important than the "fun" of narrative stories. Maggie further demonstrates how her interpretation of Common Core guides her instructional decision-making on another occasion as she spoke about the inclusion of more informational text. She said, "A lot more informational text is one of the big ones. And I've always known that was important, but Common Core kind of made me do it." She made this shift directly because of what she interpreted in Common Core.

When talking about how they planned their literacy instruction each week, the teachers did not express the reasons why they chose a particular text, other than the need to increase the use of informational text. There was no evidence that they used content knowledge about literacy instruction related to nonfiction text, nor did they talk about purposefully selecting an instructional strategy to use with a particular text. At times, they selected a particular passage because it related to the state science or social studies standards for their grade level. However, the majority of their focus was on finding an informational piece of text to use in class due to the instructional shift to 50% informational.

During one observation, Sharon's lesson focused on informational text as a result of this instructional shift.

> Sharon asked her first grade students to get their personal book boxes and bring the boxes to their desks. These book boxes had 10-15 books that were at varying levels of difficulty and various genres. She told the students for their writing activity that day they should choose an informational text and write a paragraph on what the book was about. The students each chose a book from their book box. Some of the students correctly selected an informational text, while others chose a fictional piece. Sharon circulated from desk cluster to desk cluster, telling students what they should write for a topic sentence. When she came to a student who did not choose an informational text, she told them to choose another book that "was real, not fake" and had them restart the writing assignment. A few students began writing independently, while many others talked to other students at nearby desks. One student with very limited English began to copy the text from his informational book about bugs. When Sharon reached his desk, she told him he could not copy the words and told him what to write for his topic sentence. Another student selected four different books before finding one that Sharon identified as informational text. By the end of the writing instructional time, most students had the topic sentence written down that was provided by the teacher, while a few had not started the writing assignment.

After this lesson, Sharon shared some of her reasons for planning and teaching the way she did.

> Sharon: I chose informational text because of the Standard we talked about in our [Professional Learning Community] and because the new Common Core shift…There are six shifts. One of them is to move to 50% informational text. So my lesson was also guiding them and saying look, this book is not informational…this book is. Doing that and then choosing the topic sentence…we've been working on that all year.
>
> Aimee: Is there a specific reason?
>
> Sharon: It's a standard. Yep. Just because it's a standard. The writing should have a topic sentence. It's all based on a Common Core standard. Your writing should have a topic sentence with three details and then an ending or closure.

Sharon used her interpretation of the Common Core shift to more informational text as the basis for her knowledge needed to plan the lesson that day. She did not discuss content knowledge related to why her students needed to learn how to write a topic sentence, but rather included it because it was a standard. She also felt that the activity that was observed—having to choose an informational text and write about it—was an appropriate instructional approach to literacy instruction for that day. The topic of the informational text was irrelevant. Students were not expected to master particular content area goals. They were simply supposed to read and then write a topic sentence. The messages she received to increase her use of informational text in the classroom became the foundation for how she planned and taught her literacy lesson that day.

All of the teachers spoke often about the need for 50% of their text to be informational. Sharon and Maggie would use words like, “I have to use 50% informational text because of Common Core”. Fran spoke about the shift in an interview:

> Fran: So when I’m planning, I’ll say you know what? I need to get another informational text in next week. Because I need to get it closer to 50/50.
>
> Aimee: Because of the shift?
>
> Fran: Yeah. Last year I started changing it so it was about 25% informational. But now I’m trying to make it more 50/50. So you know, that’s what role it plays for me right now for reading and language arts instruction. Just trying to keep the shifts in mind.

Fran understood this shift in Common Core as a need for her to use a greater number of informational texts in her classroom. When she spoke about selecting the text, the Common Core shift was the only reason mentioned, as opposed to selecting the text based on the learning objective or the needs of the students.

Many of the teachers focused a great deal of their literacy instruction around the use of more informational text in their lessons. They framed this through the instructional shift, citing the need to reach the goal of 50% of the text they selected for lessons to be informational text. In most cases, the teachers did not state specific reasons related to the process of literacy instruction, the differences in instruction when using a literary or informational text, or the instructional strategies that were appropriate to teach with the use of informational text.

Pulling away from the reading series. In the majority of the cases, the shift to an increase in the use of informational text meant less reliance on the stories in the Houghton Mifflin reading series. Teachers expressed that the reading series did not provide enough informational text to reach the 50% requirement demanded of Common Core. The Wayne Rogers teachers began using the science and social studies textbook as a replacement for the reading series, as well as informational text from the online program Reading A to Z (Learning A-Z, n.d.), articles from a grade level version of Scholastic News (Scholastic, 2012), and occasionally other nonfiction picture books or articles.

Some teachers, like Sharon, talked about still using Houghton Mifflin, but giving up the narrative story and focusing on just the informational passages due to this shift:

> Sharon: I'm starting to give up the main story. The narrative. Because there's other stuff that is more important. I'm holding on stronger to that informational text. I've shifted. Instead of maybe not doing the informational, now I've flip flopped it. That is different, and that is a solid thing in my teaching now. So that's happening because of that shift in Common Core.

Sharon expressed that in the past, when she had to cut things out of the Houghton Mifflin weekly lessons, the informational passage was typically what she cut out. However, when referencing that she "flip flopped it", she was referring to the narrative now being the piece she cut out. She said during another interview that she would be happy going to 80% informational text in her first grade classroom instead of just 50% because she knew it was important in Common Core.

In Emily's and Nikki's classrooms, the shift away from Houghton Mifflin was even more dramatic—they both went almost exclusively to informational text for their whole class instruction (while still choosing fiction stories for their daily read aloud) and used the reading series only once during the entire school year. They both stated that the students had primarily been taught reading using the Houghton Mifflin series in previous years, and expressed their opinion that the series focused heavily on narrative text with very little informational. Nikki expressed her thoughts on the use of Houghton Mifflin (typically referred to as "HM" by the teachers):

> Aimee: Do you ever use HM?
>
> Nikki: I haven't this year. I have in the past. I don't find the stories they have to offer particularly bad. I'm not an HM hater. But part of the Common Core, one of the shifts is to come to a balance, 50/50, narrative to informational text. And I thought…between my read aloud and the reading they choose to do on their own…which is principally narrative…I thought I would switch my focus to my science and social studies content in the classroom. And principally teach nonfiction.

Emily and Nikki both agreed that the students had a significant amount of reading instruction on fiction text in previous years, and not enough focus on informational text. They both attributed it mostly to the reading series not containing a strong enough focus on informational text, despite this not being the primary role of a typical commercial reading program. Therefore, they decided to make the use of informational text one of the primary goals in their reading instruction.

During a lesson in Emily's classroom, the students were asked to come back to the kidney shaped table at the back of the room with their fourth grade social studies textbooks. Eleven students crowded around the back table with their textbooks and a chart that was given to them the day before. Emily brought the students' attention to the bold-faced vocabulary words in the text and reviewed the meaning of the words, as they were introduced in previous lessons. The students then began to chorally read each paragraph in the textbook chapter. Approximately half of the students were reading, while others were flipping through their book or talking to another student. Emily told them they all needed to help read. After each paragraph was chorally read, Emily asked the students what a specific word meant that was found in the paragraph, including the words *similar, region,* and *landform*. The page in the chapter contained a map of the United States that had each geographic region separated by different colors. Each of the states in the regions was labeled. Emily asked the students to name the states in each region using the map, calling on individual students to respond. She also asked them to identify the color of each region. After reading three paragraphs, the students were dismissed back to their seats.

Emily spoke about her choice of using the social studies textbook for this lesson, as well as many of her lessons.

> Emily: We're in that shift with the Common Core Standards and I'm trying to use our social studies and science content as my literacy instruction instead of Houghton Mifflin.
>
> Aimee: Do you use HM at all?

> Emily: Not this year. That's all I used last year. But I think all these kids have gotten for four years is fiction. That's all they know, that's all they understand, those are the only texts they know how to tackle. And they're not getting any….I taught at a different school for half a year and the principal was very limited. Like you could only do the science or social studies once a week for thirty minutes, so it was like…they're not getting any content. They're getting fiction every single day. So this year I told my principal I don't want to use Houghton Mifflin. I want to use our science text and our social studies text.

Emily interpreted the shift to 50% of informational text that Common Core asks of teachers as needing to focus completely on informational text through the use of her social studies and science textbooks. She completely abandoned the use of Houghton Mifflin this year because of students' previous reliance on that as their only resource for literacy instruction.

Integration of literacy and content areas. More integration of literacy instruction with content areas such as science and social studies was a common result of the shift to the use of more informational text in the classroom for all of the teachers. Almost all of the teachers reported using more literacy instruction related to science or social studies standards. As previously mentioned, this was often achieved by using the content area textbook as the reading material. The strategies used with these texts were not vastly different from strategies used in previous lessons involving narrative, fictional texts, however. The teachers "chunked" the passages or chapters, taught summarizing, used vocabulary from the text, and followed the "you read it, I read it" strategy emphasized by

the Coleman video (PARCC, 2011), regardless of whether the text was informational or narrative. When Fran was planning her reading lesson during the third week of the study, she chose the text to use by “flipping through the science textbook” trying to find a passage that related to the science standard of “living things”. She expressed that she follows the same structure she typically uses when teaching a narrative story out of Houghton Mifflin—introducing vocabulary, doing a listening comprehension with an activity, and a whole class reading of the chapter, either through echo or choral reading. Fran used these strategies on separate occasions that were observed, once with a fiction story and once with the science textbook. Emily also taught a small group lesson using a fiction novel and one using the social studies textbook. In both cases, she had students “popcorn read” or chorally read, had a graphic organizer for them to fill out based on what she wrote on a piece of chart paper, and talked often about vocabulary words encountered in the text. From the start of this study in January to its conclusion three months later, more integration of literacy and content areas was visible in all the classrooms.

Concerns related to the increase in informational text. The shift to more informational text did not come without concerns from some of the teachers. Almost all of them spoke about the frustration of not having access to enough quality resources to be able to include a larger amount of informational text. This was a particularly strong concern at the kindergarten level. Maggie said she was more than willing to include more of a balance of text in the classroom but that it was very difficult to find informational text at a kindergarten reading level to use with her students during guided reading:

> Maggie: I like that they [Common Core] want informational text. It's just hard to find resources to meet that. Especially for kindergarten level. If they actually want the kids to…there's a lot available for read alouds but very little available at their reading level, in an A or B, or DRA 1 or 2. Because what it turns out to be is 'I see a blue bug, I see a brown bug'. Which to me isn't true informational text. But there's lots for read aloud. Just not a lot of quality informational text for kindergarten, and I'm not sure there ever could be, just because of the complexity.

Maggie expressed agreement with the shift to more informational text, but emphasized frequently the need for more materials at her grade level to accommodate this shift. This demonstrated her curriculum knowledge (Shulman, 1987), showing an understanding that a variety of materials are necessary to teach literacy at different instructional reading levels.

Another concern was that the drastic decrease of fiction stories in some classes would impact students' overall enjoyment of reading. Despite stating that the students would read strictly informational text all year, at one point during the study, Emily did form groups of students to read a variety of fictional texts.

> During one of these lessons, the students were called to the back of the room with their copies of the chapter book their group was reading. Emily asked the students to turn to the page they left off as a group, despite some students having already read the next several pages independently. She told them they were going to read it again as a group. When the students found the correct page, Emily called on one student to begin reading aloud. While that student read, some of the

other students in the group appeared to be following along, reading silently from their own copy of the text. Other students were looking around the room or shifting around their papers or pencil. When the student reading reached the end of the paragraph, she asked the other group members who wanted to read, then called on one of them. That student read aloud to the end of the paragraph and chose another student. This process continued with each paragraph in the story. At one point, a student in the group was called on and did not know where the students were at in the text. Emily pointed to the spot in the text that they were at and the student began reading. While the student was reading, he became unsure how to decode the work "typical". Emily wrote it on the board and told the student to try it again. Before the student responded, several other students in the group read the word aloud. At the end of that paragraph, Emily told the students they were done for the day and would read more tomorrow.

Emily talked about her use of the fiction novels in class during our interview. She emphasized that the students were still reading informational text on a daily basis with the Scholastic News stories she asked them to read during other parts of the literacy block. She decided to do one unit on fiction novels because she grew concerned that the students would not do well on the assessments if she did not do some work on literary text. Emily also shared that the students began to request chapter books instead of all the textbooks and current events articles.

Emily: They love reading books like *Flat Stanley* and *Wayside School*. It's more fun for them. Where with this (referring to nonfiction passage), they have fun with it but it's much more focused on those tough skills.

Aimee: Are you concerned about that?

Emily: Yes. Because of the Common Core shift, I think we're going to pull back a lot from books like *Wayside School* and things like that. Books like that have no place in Common Core. But the kids love it. I don't know. You have to keep them interested, too. …I mean they have to be exposed to those things that will be really difficult for them to get them college and career ready. But I like to teach my kids to just love reading.

Emily's statement that "books like that have no place in Common Core" is her own interpretation of the Common Core, not part of anything stated in the actual standards. She demonstrates her understanding of the Common Core shift to more informational text as the creation of a classroom that does not include some of the fictional chapter books she was using with her students. This interpretation of Common Core guided her pedagogical decisions and curriculum choices in her classroom.

Despite the concerns expressed by some teachers, it was evident that they were all working toward a larger percentage of informational text being used in their classrooms. They spoke about this shift regularly at faculty meetings and Professional Learning Communities, and by the end of the study, all the teachers had more nonfiction reading written into their literacy plans.

Use of standards as pedagogy. A final commonality among the literacy instruction of the teachers at Wayne Rogers was the view of the new Common Core standards as the foundation for what was taught and how it was taught in the literacy block. The teachers spoke about planning lessons based entirely on the standards and forming their pedagogical approach based on the standards as well.

When asked what they needed to know to plan their literacy instruction for a particular day, the most common answer was “the standards”. In most cases, it was the Common Core standards, but several of the teachers also talked about linking Common Core with the science or social studies state standards in integrated instruction when they planned. Emily stated:

> I’m trying to combine the Common Core Reading Standards with the social studies or science standards. So I checked to see what our social studies standards are so I know what content has to be taught…I have my Common Core app on my phone and that’s what I go through. I just check to make sure I’m hitting Common Core standards and state social studies or science standards.

Emily’s focus on the Common Core Standards as the guiding force to her lesson planning represents what she draws on for her content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). In Emily’s case, instead of referencing aspects of literacy instruction such as comprehension strategies her fourth graders might use to navigate the content area textbook, she expressed her content knowledge base in terms of the Common Core standards and the content area standards. Additionally, she did not reference pedagogical content

knowledge or her knowledge of curriculum materials as playing a role in her literacy planning.

On another occasion, Sharon spoke about how she selected her instructional focus and strategies for the literacy lesson that day. She commented that she shifted the vocabulary words to teach her first grade students. In previous years, Sharon would follow Houghton Mifflin completely. On this occasion, she changed the vocabulary words selected in her planning:

> Sharon: I think I will pull the vocabulary words out of the informational text in HM instead of the [fiction] story. I'm rarely pulling vocabulary words from the narrative text anymore.
>
> Aimee: Why is that?
>
> Sharon: Because I have to push informational text. I need to make that shift because of Common Core. In the back of my mind when I plan is always Common Core.
>
> Aimee: Is that what guides your planning the most?
>
> Sharon: Yes, there's no question. Common Core. That's got to be my focus.

Sharon's understanding of Common Core was the main focus of all aspects of her literacy planning. In this conversation, she did not talk about the students' academic needs as the reason for her text selection, nor did she articulate reasons for choosing specific vocabulary words outside of the context of Common Core. Instead, she views the Common Core standards as her foundation for her decisions about what to plan for literacy instruction.

In some cases, the impact of actual individual standards was very apparent in the pedagogical decision making for literacy. In Emily's classroom, the students were meeting in small groups to read fiction novels. Emily gave each group of students a packet of graphic organizers. She later explained that she went through all the Common Core standards that she still needed to cover and created graphic organizers for each one that related to the novels. This became the packet students used as they worked through their novel. During the small groups, students read the story aloud in "popcorn style": one student read a paragraph out loud and then called on another student in the group to read the next paragraph. On one particular day her instruction was observed, the focus of the lesson was summarizing and story elements. Emily stopped the group after three pages of popcorn reading and asked the students to identify the main characters, setting, and main events that occurred in the story that day. She wrote these on a chart paper and had students copy it into their own graphic organizer packet. The students had graphic organizers for several Common Core Standards that needed to be "covered" yet that year.

Emily explained her planning of this lesson and choosing this instructional approach to literacy instruction for this lesson:

> Emily: So I went through all the CC standards and basically made a graphic organizer for every standard. I did a story map for sequence. And then just reflections where I ask them…they're more like opinionated things where they use examples from the text. What do you think about this, that type of thing. Inferences. Vocabulary. Context clues. Making connections. Characterization. Compare and contrast. This will be, we'll use this the entire way through the

> book. It hits all the different standards. So I'm using this with my two lower groups. The grade level group will be doing some things like this. The higher group, not nearly as much with the basic stuff.

Emily utilized the standards themselves as her foundation for pedagogical content knowledge when planning her lesson that day. She stated, "I guess what I try to do is take a standard and break it down into steps." Pedagogical content knowledge involves viewing individual students from a pedagogical perspective, and considering different strategies and methods that can be used to help students understand concepts (Shulman, 1987). Emily interpreted the Common Core Standards as her base of pedagogical content knowledge when she described her teaching approach as "breaking the standards into steps", rather than discussing the variety of instructional approaches she might use to teach the content described in the standards. When she spoke about how her instruction differed from high achieving readers to more struggling readers, she again talked about breaking the standards down more for the struggling readers. The graphic organizers she spoke about previously serve as an example of how she broke the standards down more for the students who needed extra support. Higher achieving students were given the packet of organizers to complete independently while the struggling readers completed them in a small group with Emily. In other words, the pedagogical approach did not differ; instead, the level to which she deconstructed the standard and provided step-by-step instructions differed. The Common Core Standards were the common thread in all the lessons with all students, as they functioned in the role of curriculum.

The shift to an increased focus on text dependency, whole class instruction with grade level text, and informational text in the classroom was evident in the classrooms of all teachers in this study. Additionally, all of the teachers attributed these aspects of their literacy instruction to the Common Core and its corresponding instructional shifts. The teachers received all of their information regarding Common Core from the school district. Therefore, the district's interpretation of Common Core that was shared with teachers had a significant impact on the way that the teachers at Wayne Rogers planned and implemented literacy instruction.

Common Core: Biggest Influence on Instruction

The Common Core State Standards Initiative was overall the most frequently stated influence on how teachers at Wayne Rogers Elementary School planned and implemented their literacy instruction during the three months that were spent on site in 2012. All the teachers in the study referenced the standards or the related "instructional shifts" on a regular basis, with most teachers stating that Common Core was the number one factor they considered when they made decisions regarding literacy instruction.

All of the teachers at Wayne Rogers received their information about Common Core from the same group of individuals within the district. Therefore, the teachers were all hearing the same messages about Common Core. Each teacher was asked in an interview where their information came from, and they all reported "from the district". Emily shared her response:

Aimee: How do you get your information on Common Core?
Emily; Professional development.

> Aimee: From the district?
>
> Emily; Yeah. Basically that's it. I have the documents and we've gone over those quite a bit. But it's basically the focus of our professional development every week.

Fran responded in much the same way:

> Aimee: Where do you get your information on Common Core?
>
> Fran: From the district trainings. Professional Learning Communities. Staff Meetings. Sometimes district implementation specialists come in. But all from there.

None of the teachers stated that they turned to an outside source, website, or professional organization to develop their interpretations and understandings of Common Core. Their interpretations about the initiative were shaped by what the district personnel shared at trainings, as well as the messages they heard from colleagues or from videos about the Common Core.

The teachers' information on Common Core came directly from the school district trainings, school staff meetings, and reading the Common Core document. At the end of the 2010-2011 school year, teachers were informed that the new standards were going to be coming. According to Maggie,

> It was just suck it up and this is what you're doing. It was weird how the district did it. We got a couple little meetings, and they're like, don't count on this, it's not final. Then it changed three or four times before we got our final

> copy…before summer, thankfully. But it wasn't really set until then. They just kind of warned us it was coming.

One of the secondary informants, a district level administrator, shared a glimpse of the process the district used in determining how they would implement the Common Core within the school district. She stated that rather than deconstructing the standards into skills, which the district wanted to pull away from, they chose to focus on the Common Core "shifts". This decision came from a small group of district personnel, who knew this was a unique approach and was unlike the ways that many other districts throughout the country were implementing the Common Core. Additionally, rather than interpreting the standards and shifts themselves, they chose to follow the intentions of the Common Core authors, including the previously mentioned David Coleman. Within the shifts, there was an emphasis by the district administrators on the ones dealing with "text complexity" and "text dependent questions", as the district felt these would create a change in instruction, as well as increased performance on the assessments once those assessments were fully aligned with Common Core.

There were multiple opportunities for district and building level trainings on Common Core available to the teachers at Wayne Rogers. A Common Core Task Force was created in the district, which consisted of teachers from various schools coming together regularly to discuss the instructional shifts, talk about the messages from the Common Core authors, and share their implementation of exemplar lessons that were created by the Student Achievement Partners organization (Student Achievement Partners, n.d.). Some teachers in the district attended a one-day professional development

workshop that was led by speakers from The Common Core Institute (The Common Core Institute, 2011). At Wayne Rogers, all teachers at the site were exposed to these exemplar lessons and the Coleman video (PARCC, 2011) through faculty meetings and/or Common Core district trainings.

Several opportunities for professional development on the Common Core were offered to teachers during the time of the study. Three teachers attended at least one district training specifically focused on the literacy Common Core Standards, one participated in a workshop related to the math standards, and the remaining two received all their information at faculty meetings, where colleagues shared information from trainings, or when district employees from the central office presented information and shared resources.

One training that was offered during the time of this study was facilitated by a speaker from an organization called The Common Core Institute. This organization employs "academics, trainers, and educators who partner with universities, national organization, and businesses to bring together all stakeholders for implementation of the new Common Core State Standards focused on College and Career Readiness" (Common Core Institute, 2011). For a fee, the organization will send a speaker to a school district to focus on issues like deconstructing the Common Core Standards. Fran was the only teacher at Wayne Rogers who volunteered to accept the district's invitation to attend professional development that was held by The Common Core Institute. However, she expressed that she did not enjoy the training and felt she did not get a lot of good information from it because she did not think it was practical information for teachers:

> Fran: What they were having us do is, well, all morning…it was a guy from a national Common Core institute. I don't know his name. I guess the district brought him in and he was talking about basically the shifts. They (Common Core) have these shifts. So he talked about that. Basically all morning (laughs).
>
> Aimee: What were some of the things you took from that?
>
> Fran: Not much, really. I'd have to review my notes. We did get something cool. We got a Common Core Standards planner. Which is kind of nice because it shows you how to plan with the standards. Do you want to see it? And he taught us how to, like, deconstruct the standards. And talk about the dominant, well not dominant, but the vocabulary within each standard. And stuff like that. Which, that part I didn't really get. A lot of the time I didn't know what he was talking about to be honest (laughs). I would turn to the woman next to me and say, do you know what he's talking about? No, ok…

Fran expressed frustration regarding this particular Common Core training. She viewed it as being of little help, and interpreted the information from this training differently than she did trainings that were shared by school district personnel. She felt the district had more valuable information to offer that was more "teacher friendly". Her lack of understanding regarding the content of the presentation made her unwilling to share the information she received with the rest of her staff. Fran placed more value on the information that was shared directly from personnel within the school district over the information from an outside speaker, as was the case in this training.

The Common Core Lesson Planner book (The Common Core Institute, 2011) Fran referred to was meant as a tool for teacher to record their lesson plans with alignment to the Common Core. In addition to the traditional block of space for writing the day's activities, there was a spot to indicate what percentage of reading instruction during that time was spent on nonfiction materials. There were also checklists within each planning block to indicate if writing instruction focused on the task of "persuade", "explain" or "convey". The front section of the planner also offered "Recommendations for Instructional Planning", which included deconstructing the standards, teaching with a clear focus, modeling the strategy, and scaffolding learning through clear directions and step-by-step activities. Fran appreciated the resource, but felt it was "a bit much" for teachers to use on a regular basis. She did not plan on sharing any of the information from the training with staff because she did not feel it helped her grow in her understanding of what the district wanted teachers to do with Common Core.

The regular district trainings were typically facilitated by district level staff from the curriculum and instruction department. Several teachers across the district were part of an ongoing coalition that met regularly throughout the year to discuss Common Core. During these trainings, there was a strong focus on the instructional shifts in the Common Core, as well as exemplar lessons that were created either by outside sources such as the Student Achievement Partners (Student Achievement Partners, n.d.), or sometimes created within the district. Teachers were asked to take the lessons, use them in their classrooms, and share them with other faculty members. This was a significant method for other teachers at Wayne Rogers to receive the same information, even if they did not

attend a district training. All of the trainings from the district framed the teachers' interpretations and understandings of Common Core, which led to the way they planned and taught literacy.

Common Core: Teachers' Interpretations Shaped by District

The teachers at Wayne Rogers Elementary received all of their information about Common Core from the school district and the resources the district used to implement the new standards. This was seen in the data on literacy instruction in the previous section, as well as in the ways that teachers spoke about Common Core. The teachers all shared that the Common Core "dug deeper" and that the standards were "more rigorous" than previous state standards used.

"Deeper" and "more rigorous". Part of the teachers' interpretations about Common Core that were shaped by the district related to how they perceived the new Common Core standards differing from the previous state standards. Prior to this school year, the teachers at Wayne Rogers used a combination of the state standards and the basal reading series to make decisions about their literacy instruction. This year, the focus was predominantly on the Common Core Standards. Almost all of the teachers commented during the interviews that the Common Core standards differed from the previous state standards in English Language Arts. They used the same words and phrases to describe the Common Core Standards, such as "more rigorous" and "deeper". When asked how they determined the Common Core standards dug deeper, they usually referred to information they received in trainings. Fran and Maggie both commented on the idea of "digging deeper":

> Fran: That's what you're supposed to do. With Common Core, you're supposed to screech on the brakes and slow way down and really delve into things deeply.
>
> Aimee: How do you know that?
>
> Fran: From the trainings and things. They told us…. deeper. Like, we're not trying to cover as much. We just want to go deeply into things, you know.

Fran's remark, "That's what you're supposed to do", demonstrates her reliance on the district's message of what Common Core's intentions are. She interpreted this message to be the true intent of Common Core, and accepted this as what she should then use as her philosophy in the classroom. As previous studies have shown (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006; Grossman & Thompson, 2004), a school district's interpretation of educational initiatives can significantly impact the beliefs and practices of the classroom teachers.

"Digging deeper" was mentioned frequently by all of the teachers. Maggie discussed this idea as well during an interview:

> Maggie: But they [Common Core] give them enough time and the ability to just kind of dig in and let them experience it and talk about [the text]. Which I really like. I think Common Core is letting us really…instead of, you've got to teach this story today, you've got to do the questions, then you're done and go to the next one. I think Common Core lets us use more complex text. And teaching the kids how to look at a text and how to interpret it and maybe disagree with it. All that stuff that I'm not sure, when we had so much to do…
>
> Aimee: So much from….?

Maggie: From Houghton Mifflin. You know, you have to get to the end of the book by the end of the year. And you have to skip stuff or go through so quickly, you know the kids don't get it. So that's why I like Common Core. It lets us go into deeper things.

Aimee: And that's new?

Maggie: I think so. I think it's encouraged, is new.

In previous school years, Maggie used the Houghton Mifflin reading series with complete fidelity, meaning she taught all the stories, used the script in the book, and incorporated the supplemental materials with her class. Because the school mandated the use of the reading program, Maggie interpreted this to mean her daily instruction should focus on what was suggested in the reading series. By comparing the use of Houghton Mifflin to the Common Core, Maggie demonstrates her interpretation that the Common Core Standards are taking the place of Houghton Mifflin, and are acting as the new curriculum at the school.

The teachers sometimes had difficulty explaining the concept of "digging deeper" when asked to verbalize how the Common Core dug deeper as compared to the previously used state standards for English Language Arts.

Sharon: Well, in my plans, I wanted to focus on…I still have reading and writing. But I would have liked to focus on…some science or social studies text. So what I did was… dug deeper into the standard. And I think that's what the district's goal is. The goal is for us to dig deeper. Because we had a presentation at our early release last week and they said to dig deeper. But [the presenter] was

> talking about taking the same text in different ways to learn how to read it with or without prior knowledge, understanding…so really digging into the text and taking three days to do it.

Sharon explained that her way of digging deeper in the text that day was when her students read the story from Houghton Mifflin in "round robin" style during an observed lesson. She interpreted the "digging deeper" message from the presentation at the staff meeting as needing to spend three days on the same text, rather than just one day, as she would previously have done.

Slowing down as a way to dig deeper was an interpretation teachers made from the Coleman video, which was used in district trainings. All of the teachers at Wayne Rogers that spoke about the message of "digging deeper" interpreted this to mean slowing down with lessons and spending multiple days on the same text, a practice they expressed was unlike their experiences using the reading series. The trainings from the district framed the teachers' understandings of what it meant to provide depth to their instruction in literacy, and the extra time spent on a specific story became part of the teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987). While sometimes unsure what to do with the additional days spent reading the text, it was clear that the teachers interpreted that it was necessary to incorporate this approach into their instruction.

In addition to Common Core standards "digging deeper", the idea that the new standards are more rigorous than the previous state standards was often articulated by all the teachers. Emily talked about this idea:

> They [the district] said they are more rigorous….and I think they are more rigorous. They are asking our students to work with more difficult text. To use skills, the higher-level Blooms skills like synthesis and analysis. And teaching our kids to dive in with less scaffolding. Which I think is necessary because those are the…they're going to have to have those skills in place when they get to college.

Some teachers also used the multiple reading of a text, as mentioned previously, as an example of how the standards were more rigorous, in addition to using that as an example of "digging deeper". Many of the teachers began spending four or more days on a single text, as opposed to one or two days as they had previously done. In some cases, like Fran or Sharon, the extra time on the text meant reading it in a different way (chorally versus round robin). For others, like Nikki, the rereading of the text was meant to provide opportunities for students to independently gain more meaning from the text. Nikki attributed this new approach to her instruction to some of the things she learned in district Common Core trainings. She stated, "The work I am doing is validated in the shift that's coming in the Common Core". This illustrates how the teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987) was framed almost completely by their interpretations of Common Core.

Most of the times when teachers were asked how they concluded these ideas about the Common Core standards, they gave a few examples from the standards themselves, but usually stated that they were given those messages at a school presentation or district training.

> Aimee: So, was there something you did or a process you went through to

make that decision that they were more rigorous?

Maggie: From how the district told us. And just by reading them, they are. They have higher expectations.

Aimee: Can you think of an example at your grade level in literacy?

Maggie: They need to know long and short vowels. That's new. That's one. But they do need to know both informational and narrative text. So a lot more in depth. A lot of…they need to know characters, setting, main idea…that's a big focus. So a lot more rigorous there.

Maggie interpreted the addition of information her kindergarten students needed to know, such as long vowels and identifying setting in stories, as a higher level of rigor in the new Common Core standards. Other teachers also mentioned additional concepts students needed to learn, as well as higher ordering thinking skills, as reasons they interpreted the new standards as being more rigorous.

All of the teachers talked about information regarding Common Core using the lens of the school district or building trainings. None of them talked about going outside the district—to websites, professional organizations, or journals—to get information about Common Core. According to Shulman (1987), part of a teacher's knowledge base involves the theories, literature, and research that exist in a teacher's subject area. For the teachers at Wayne Rogers, the content knowledge they expressed regarding literacy was almost completely related to the content of the Common Core Standards and the interpretations offered by the school district. There was no evidence in classroom observations or in the interviews that the teachers were relying on other aspects of their

professional knowledge base outside of their interpretations of Common Core, which came directly from the school district's implementation of the new standards.

Literacy Instruction and Common Core

The teachers at Wayne Rogers remarked frequently throughout the three months of the study that the Common Core standards were the overall factor guiding what they planned and how they taught in regard to reading instruction. Most teachers started by looking at the standards, or at least by keeping the instructional shifts in mind, as they planned. They also thought about how those standards would be assessed and planned their instructional approach accordingly, to help students be better prepared for the end of the year assessments and in hopes of having students show higher achievement. The teachers did not talk about relying on their own professional knowledge base to make decisions regarding literacy instruction, even when they shared their knowledge of existing research on effective literacy pedagogy. Instead, they turned to the school district and the resources the district used to decide what role Common Core should play in their literacy instruction.

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Implications

The focus of this ethnographic study has been to explore the question, How do elementary teachers plan and implement literacy instruction? In the earlier chapters, a review of related literature was presented, as well as the methodology, data sources, and data analysis procedures used. Data collected in the study was presented in the previous chapter. In this final chapter, conclusions and interpretations regarding the data will be shared through a critical theory lens, using the metaphor of policy cascades to describe the structure inherent in school systems that impacts teachers and other individuals and groups within the system. These policy cascades directly lead to the development of learned dependency in teachers, which will be described. Next, the tenets of a critically literate perspective will be outlined as a response to the learned dependency of teachers. The chapter will conclude with implications and suggestions for further research.

Policy Cascades

When one thinks of cascades, it is not difficult to picture the forceful strength of the water plummeting down a cliff side. Cascades are often formed when a river is rather young, carving deeper into the earth and growing in strength over time. As the cascades fall, the soft rocks and soil easily become eroded, while harder rocks take longer to wear away. While sometimes viewed as peaceful, cascades can also be quite chaotic, and it can become difficult to define where a cascade truly ends and where it begins (Fuller, n.d.).

The formation and implementation of educational policy within schools can be very much like a waterfall---or, a policy cascade. The term *policy cascades* is created for this study to describe the process that occurs within the schooling system as a result of

educational policies. Bikhchandani, Hirschleifer, and Welch (1992) introduced a related term, “informational cascades”, in the field of economics. They stated, “An informational cascade occurs when it is optimal for an individual, having observed the actions of those ahead of him, to follow the behavior of the preceding individual without regard to his own information” (p. 992). Policy cascades are specific to the effects of implementing a new policy in education. They occur when teachers, after receiving information from other groups and individuals above them in the hierarchical structure of a schooling system, have their own professional knowledge base and beliefs eroded, and instead adopt the actions and ideology demonstrated by other groups and individuals. The policy cascades that result from the creation of the Common Core State Standards, an initiative that is the focus of the current study, are illustrated in Figure 1 and expanded upon in the following sections.

In a policy cascade, the information begins with a small group of people who are in a position of power, much like the top of a waterfall. It starts when the policy is “young”, or at the creation and initial implementation stage of a policy, growing in strength as more states, schools, and teachers learn about it. As the policy information begins to fall downward, it typically passes through state officials, school district administration, and building principals before it reaches the teachers. Throughout the process, the policy cascades have the power to erode the beliefs of all of the groups and individuals they touch, and when the teachers are exposed, they will potentially begin to ignore their own beliefs and interpretations that have been worn down, and instead look at the actions of those who encountered the policy before them. This reflects the

theoretical foundation of critical theory that all thought is mediated by power relations that exist in all aspects of society (Apple, 1999; Giroux, 2001; Kellner, 2003; Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Popkewitz, 1999; Rasmussen, 1996). The policy cascades also reflect the notion of critical theory that when certain individuals—in this case, the literacy teachers—accept their position in the cascades as natural or necessary, the oppression of those individuals is reproduced and continued over time (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011).

For the teachers at Wayne Rogers, the authors of the Common Core State Standards Initiative (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) were at the top of the policy cascades. The group of people responsible for writing the standards document and for creating subsequent resources for teachers on how to align instruction to the Common Core held the power to decide what knowledge was significant and relevant for kindergarten through twelfth grade students in most of the nation's schools. The Common Core Initiative states that parents, teachers, school administrators, and educational experts were involved in the creation of the standards, but the official authors are listed as the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers (2010). Their interpretations of literacy education and what they believe is important for students in relation to literacy dominate the policy cascade. Additionally, certain leading authors like David Coleman, have stepped forward and developed "exemplar lessons" and resources for teachers following the release of the Common Core Standards (PARCC, 2011). The authors are also at the very top of the policy cascades and their

beliefs influence the districts that choose to distribute these lessons and resources to teachers. Educational policies at their creation have always been tied to the value systems, economic systems, and political beliefs of the dominant ideologies in the nation at that point in history (O'Quinn, 2005). The groups with power in the larger society and in the government historically have had more to do with shaping the educational decisions in our country than the individuals who live with the reality of our educational systems on a daily basis (Apple, 1999). Consequently, these groups with power shape the individuals and groups below them in the policy cascade.

The policy cascades flow down to the various departments of education in individual states. This is the natural progression of the cascades for any educational policy, as states begin to make decisions regarding the impact a federal policy or initiative will have at the state level. Within the Common Core policy cascades, each state had an option to keep their current state standards for students or to adopt the new Common Core Standards. Although it was a voluntary choice to adopt the standards, states were not eligible to receive certain funds such as grants from the Race to the Top Initiative (US Department of Education, 2009) if they elected not to implement Common Core. Therefore, while voluntary, the government and policymakers at the top of the policy cascades still hold power over the states through control of financial assistance.

At the time of this study, 45 states and the District of Columbia adopted the Common Core Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). States have elected to adopt the Common Core for a variety of reasons. The most frequently cited reason, according to the Center

on Educational Policy (Kober & Rentner, 2011), was the rigor and the quality the Common Core standards had over the existing state standards. Another reason sometimes offered is the incentive of the funds coming from the Race to the Top grants (Finn, 2012). While some states voiced concerns about the fear of losing control over decision-making for their schools, many felt the power to make decisions would still remain at the state level, and that the ultimate goal of having students be prepared to compete at an international level outweighed these concerns (Colorado Department of Education, 2010; New Jersey School Boards Association, 2010). The states that elected to adopt the new Common Core standards were, in many instances, influenced by the funding that was tied to the standards as well as the pressure for students to compete at a global level, as determined by the authors of the Common Core. These states relented that the decisions they previously made individually on what was appropriate knowledge for the students in their schools did not prepare students to compete internationally as well as the Common Core Standards will. This could be viewed that the need for nationalizing a set of common standards is evidence that states are no longer trusted to organize and monitor their students' education (Delandshere & Petrosky, 2004).

Not every state elected to adopt the Common Core. Texas, Virginia, Alaska, Nebraska, and Minnesota elected not to replace their existing standards with the new standards for various reasons. For example, the governor and state education commissioner of the state of Texas made the decision to "preserve its sovereign authority" to determine what was best for the children in Texas schools (Burke, 2010). Alaska cited the cost of implementing Common Core as part of the reason for not

adopting the standards, particularly because of the necessary expenses that are problematic with bringing the teachers in remote locations across the state to a central location for professional development (Burke, 2010). Some states, such as Alaska and Virginia, have not formally adopted the Common Core standards, but have woven some of the content from them into their existing state standards to remain in control of decisions regarding education in their schools, but still expecting some of the same levels of rigor that they feel the Common Core standards offer (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, n.d.; Virginia Department of Education, 2011). Recently, two states have had reconsiderations about their decision to go forward with the adoption of Common Core. South Carolina tried to take action with a bill attempting to prevent the implementation of Common Core in the state (it was subsequently voted against), and Utah expressed concerns by initially asking the state school board to reconsider implementing the Common Core, then modifying it to a request to keep a close eye on the process of implementation and to allow the state to back out of the implementation if they lost control over educational decisions in the state (Gewertz, 2012, March 1). The consequence to remaining independent and putting up resistance to the effects of the policy cascades is that these states become ineligible for additional funding from the Race to the Top grant. Because of this, some states like Alaska have stated there is a possibility they will reconsider adopting the standards (Alaska Department of Education and Early Development, n.d.). This is a way that policy cascades are hegemonic—the powerful position of the policymakers and government win the consent of the nondominant group, causing them to unknowingly participate in their

own oppression (McLaren, 1989). As a result, the policy cascades end up eroding the original beliefs of officials at the state level.

When the policy cascades reach the school district level, a lot of power to make decisions has already been diminished. For instance, the school district in the current study had no decision-making power in regard to whether or not to implement Common Core. Once the state Department of Education made the decision, the district was mandated to require teachers across the district to begin teaching under the new standards. Where they had some power, however, was in deciding how the implementation process would take place throughout the school district. After years of pressure to have students in the district perform on statewide assessments at the end of the year in order to make Adequately Yearly Progress under NCLB, the district's own ideologies were already eroded by the policy cascades. The district administration needed to continue to show improvement in student achievement on statewide tests. For this reason, the school district in this study decided not to develop its own interpretation of the Common Core. Instead, they wanted to remain close to the intent of the authors.

According to a report by the Center on Education Policy (Kober & Rentner, 2011), most states are not requiring school districts to change their curriculum program or instructional practices in order to support the new Common Core standards, and many states are not implementing a full change to Common Core immediately. However, the school district in this study, after originally creating a timeline that would have grades 3-12 slowly making the change to the new Common Core Standards, asked teachers to be fully implementing the Common Core about six months after the school year began.

The district chose to implement the Common Core by focusing on the instructional shifts, and by utilizing many of the materials and resources created by organizations such as Student Achievement Partners (Student Achievement Partners, n.d.), which was founded by some of the leading authors of Common Core. The focus on the shifts differs from the common approach that most districts across the nation are taking, which involves deconstructing the standards with teachers and examining the changes present in the new Common Core standards as compared to the state ones, a process recommended by the National Association of State Boards of Education (Gewertz, 2012, March 24). Additionally, many districts have created teams of administrators and teachers to help make decisions regarding the implementation of Common Core within their district (Education Northwest, 2012). In the district involved in this study, the implementation decisions were made by a small group of administrators. School district administration can have a powerful impact on the way policies are interpreted and implemented at a site level (Knapp, Shields, & Padilla, 1995). This power, in conjunction with the lack of involvement of teachers, furthers the impact of the policy cascades in this district.

The power structures involved in policy cascades continue to spill downward, with the effects reaching the building level. The degree to which building administrators can make decisions under the policy cascades varies considerably from district to district. However, the building administrator is always shaped by preceding decisions of other dominant groups or individuals. The administrator at Wayne Rogers made the decision to incorporate a significant amount of focus on Common Core implementation into

Professional Learning Communities and schooolwide faculty meetings. Additionally, the administrator selected the Common Core Instructional Shift dealing with informational text to be a focus for the entire school, and she expected teachers to begin implementing the shift within their classrooms.

In an actual cascade, the rocks at the bottom of the falling water will be cut apart, with pieces breaking away over time and with continued forceful impact of the rushing water above it. In a policy cascade, the classroom teachers are absorbing the forceful impact of the decisions, interpretations, and ideologies of groups and individuals with more power that are above them. By this point, the policymakers' intentions have already impacted many other people on the way down to the teachers. The teachers at Wayne Rogers had their own beliefs and knowledge base eroded by the cascade and continually turned to the individuals and groups above them in the cascade for direction on how and what to teach. The policy implementation process of the school district and the resulting shift in teachers' instructional beliefs and practices was not one of blatant force. Rather, in a hegemonic fashion, control and dominance were being exercised and maintained through consensual social practices and social structures embedded within the existing school system (McLaren, 1989). Teachers were mandated to implement the Common Core Standards. However, the interpretation the district is using—that which is aligned to the Common Core shifts and the beliefs of the authors—became the accepted interpretation of the teachers through compliance and acceptance that it was the dominant ideology and one that the teachers should follow. Teachers volunteered to attend trainings by the school district. If they did not attend, they then participated in staff meetings

where teachers who did attend the trainings shared information. Through a hegemonic process of presenting their ideas, the district won the compliance and consent of the teachers throughout the district, further eroding the teachers' own beliefs and creating a strong force of dependence through the policy cascades.

The policy cascades that were in place were slowly eroding the professional knowledge base of the teachers. The teachers referred to the standards or to curriculum for their necessary content knowledge, and struggled to define their pedagogical content knowledge base (Shulman, 1987). Teachers were pulling away from numerous strategies they had previously felt were part of effective literacy pedagogy, and it always linked back to the messages they heard about Common Core from the district. In one case, Emily stated that the messages being shared in a video (PARCC, 2011) did not match up at all with the research she read about literacy instruction during all of her graduate classes. However, she discounted her previous knowledge base that was formed from reading that research and adopted the new district messages in their place. These kinds of remarks demonstrate how the policy cascades can result in teachers' own pedagogical content knowledge being worn down and replaced by someone else's message or viewpoint.

The teachers at Wayne Rogers received all of their information about the Common Core from the groups above them in the policy cascades. This further eroded their own interpretations. This was partially because of the geographic isolation from other school districts in the state, as well as a greater distance from larger metropolitan areas. This meant that the district's ideologies and the kinds of professional development

strategies they deemed valuable were the only ones that most teachers were exposed to. Receiving all the information about a policy or initiative like Common Core from one group, your "only world" (Apple, 1979), led teachers to incorporate the district's interpretation of Common Core as their own. The teachers did not receive multiple perspectives on the new policy, nor did they seek out information on their own from other sources like professional organizations or websites. As Fran explained it, "Everything comes from the district trainings. Or professional learning communities. The district implementation specialists. That's where I get my information." Since they were located at the bottom of the policy cascade, they learned to be dependent on the groups above them to determine what was essential to know about the Common Core and how it should look within their own classroom.

Another factor that impacted how the teachers were shaped by the policy cascades was their perception of autonomy at their school site. Teachers at Wayne Rogers consistently talked about the supportive school climate and a general feeling of having their professional judgment valued. This stemmed almost completely from the fact that the school principal did not mandate the use of the district reading series. When teachers feel they can control certain aspects of their work, they tend to develop a feeling of autonomy (Short, 1994). However, a truly autonomous person is not shaped by outside manipulations like the ones that exist in policy cascades (Greene, 1988). While one might think feeling autonomous is a positive situation for the teachers, it can actually further erode their ability to resist dominant ideologies in the policy cascades. Teachers are more willing to accept changes and ideas that they expect to have a positive impact on

students (Ballet, Kelchtermans, & Loughran, 2006). When the district shares only the advantages of policies and does not ask teachers to question some interpretations of them, teachers will be more willing to implement those policies without question. They will have less reason to resist them if their own views are being worn away by policy cascades.

The impact of policy cascades did not originate with the Common Core. There is a history of policy cascades in the district that took place over the course of many years. All but two of the teachers spent their entire public education careers in the post-NCLB era of teaching, which meant that policy governed their professional lives for all or most of their career. According to Delandshere and Petrosky (2004), educational policy and standards-based teacher education can “impose on teachers and their learning a fixed political will that shapes their capacities, who they become as teachers, and positions them primarily as implementers of content and pedagogy as defined by the standards” (p. 7). The professional lives of the teachers had been shaped by the policy cascades beginning with NCLB and continued into the current school year. The teachers began to rely on these policies to create the structure of their classrooms, as well as to shape their own professional identities.

This critical ethnography examined the ways that social, political, and cultural factors can condition the beliefs, knowledge, and practice of the teachers at Wayne Rogers (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005) through the process of the policy cascades, and how the impact of the policy cascades had a direct influence on literacy instruction at the school. The ideologies held by the group at the top of the cascades are directly reflected

in the language and actions of the teachers at the bottom of the cascades, which is reflected in the tension created by the collision of policy implementation and a teacher's own belief systems (Palmer & Rangell, 2010). According to Darling-Hammond (1990), the way that teachers encounter, interpret, and implement policy is not just a function of how that policy is transmitted to them, but it is also a part of the educational context in which the policy is received after it passes through the existing hierarchy in school systems. Some teachers may not have interpreted their own ideology and knowledge base as being decayed, due largely in part to the hegemonic nature of policy cascades. Dominant power structures operate in many ways, which are often hidden from plain sight (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011). The end result of these policy cascades is often a teacher that has learned to be dependent on outside factors to shape his or her own beliefs about instructional practices that should occur in the classroom. The following section presents this concept of "learned dependency", the consequence to policy cascades.

Learned Dependency: "Just tell me how to teach!"

Part of the consequences of the Common Core policy cascades were the teachers at Wayne Rogers developing *learned dependency*[2] on outside factors when making decisions about their own classroom, while ignoring their knowledge base and own ideology. For the purposes of this study, the term *learned dependency* is defined as an individual's reliance on outside influences, rather than internal factors, to make decisions and form beliefs, due to the significant presence those outside forces have had on his or her work and life for a considerable amount of time. Policy cascades have existed in

school districts like the one in this study for years, and over time, teachers have formed a stronger sense of learned dependency on the groups that shape their beliefs in those cascades. Once these factors have been imposed upon individuals repeatedly over time, the individuals learn to depend almost completely on those outside forces, rather than their own knowledge, beliefs, and ideas, despite their own education, training, and experiences.

Interpreting new information from the lens of the familiar is typically how meaning is constructed by individuals (Darling-Hammond, 1990). In the case of the teachers at Wayne Rogers, the "lens of the familiar" was viewing new information through someone else's interpretation; therefore, they continued to encounter new information in this same manner. They learned to depend on someone else telling them what to teach, and in many cases, how to teach it. This was seen when teachers continually asked for trainings telling them how to "teach the Common Core", when they changed their instruction because of what they thought the district wanted, or when they unquestioningly replaced their existing beliefs about literacy instruction with the new messages from the district. The teachers had been shaped by existing policy cascades in the districts for years—some teachers for their whole career—and as a result, they developed a learned dependency on the school district to tell them what and how to teach.

Existing under the structure of a policy cascade has worn away the beliefs and practices of individuals and groups for years and has created a learned dependency in teachers, causing them to seek validation, information, and interpretation from outside sources. The intent of this critical ethnography is not to critique the Common Core;

policies and initiatives such as Common Core are not inherently negative, and can often have great value in the literacy classroom. The critique is of the structure of a policy cascade, and the resulting educational system in which teachers must exist. Although the policy cascades are forceful and dominating, teachers can build up resistance to their power through the development of a critical literacy perspective.

Becoming Critical Under the Policy Cascades: "I'm the captain of the ship"

The biggest factor that can help teachers combat learned dependency and resist the erosion from a policy cascade is the development of a critical literacy perspective. A critical approach to education requires a teacher to address the relationships between schooling, culture, society, and politics (Popkewitz, 1999), as well as addressing the dominant ideologies represented in educational policy, with certain groups' beliefs privileged while others are marginalized (Apple, 1979; Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1980; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005; McLaren, 1989). Critical literacy theory takes these same tenets of critical theory and recognizes the value of using literacy as a tool for individuals and groups to become empowered, to question and challenge texts, to "disrupt the status quo", and to lead to emancipation for oppressed individuals and groups. (Comber, 2001; Comber, Nixon, and Ashmore, 2005; Lewison, Flint, & VanSluys, 2002; Luke, 2007; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2010; Morrell, 2005; Shannon, 1990). When literacy teachers are critically literate, they possess these ideas and abilities to critically consume text, whether it is the document of the Common Core standards, text they are told to teach by the school district, or media regarding pedagogy and curriculum in their classrooms.

Teachers can, and should, use a critical perspective when encounter any new text, including the implementation plan for Common Core.

A critical literacy perspective can become part of a teacher's professional knowledge base. Two parts to a knowledge base that Shulman (1986, 1987) describes are content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge. Critically literate teachers should be able to examine the connection between a vast content knowledge base in literacy, ranging from developmental stages of literacy instruction and acquisition to professional standards for literacy teachers, as well as a wide pedagogical content knowledge base regarding the many strategies that can be used to teach students the content needed in literacy. There should be a direct connection between these parts of a critically literate teacher's knowledge base. Critically literate teachers can not only tell you *how* they are going to teach a certain concept in literacy, but also *why* they are teaching it in a particular way.

Developing a critical perspective as a teacher can have a huge impact on the way one is shaped by the policies that cascade down every day in the classroom. According to Kincheloe, McLaren, and Steinberg (2011), "the oppressive culture created in our schools by top-down content standards…is challenged" through a critical perspective (p. 166). Critically literate teachers are teachers who understand the power implications in educational policies and reforms, and begin to question these issues of power before implementing those policies within their own classrooms. A critical teacher also recognizes that knowledge is essentially mediated through historically and socially constructed power relations, and that the economic and political issues that are dominant

at the time have a direct impact on the ways that policies are interpreted within schools. According to Avila and Moore (2012), developing a critical literacy lens through which to view the Common Core Standards and related messages is absolutely crucial to teachers being able to help themselves and their students become truly empowered.

Even if teachers perceive they have freedom, autonomy, and power, if they are simply implementing policy without critical reflection, they are not opening the doors for their students to learn to become critically literate consumers of text and information. Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman (2012) caution educators that the Common Core Standards are already affecting what is published, mandated, and tested in schools—as well as what is neglected and marginalized. If teachers do not recognize this and teach with a critical literacy perspective, students in their classrooms will be shaped only by the knowledge of the dominant ideology. Teachers need to be the ones to interpret, adapt, and shape policy and reforms as they put them in place in the classroom (Coburn, 2011). Teachers should determine the individual path to the implementation of Common Core—a path that is appropriate for their students.

Developing tenets of critical literacy is not a guarantee that teachers will remain untouched by policy cascades or will not develop a degree of learned dependency. According to Koehler (1990), the continuum on which a teacher rests is not necessarily dependent to autonomous, but rather most dependent to least dependent. At Wayne Rogers, Nikki showed resistance to some of the policies and mandates. She did not read the script from any curriculum materials, and discussed using texts with her students that dealt with issues of power in order to help them to develop positions about issues by

reading multiple perspectives of those issues. However, even with this critical literacy perspective, Nikki was susceptible to the influence of the district's interpretation of Common Core, as well as the messages in the videos she saw at the trainings. Fran also had tenets of a critical perspective, claiming to be "the captain of the ship" when it came to decision making in her classroom. However, she also was shaped by the policy cascades within the school. While developing a critical literature perspective does not erase all possibility of effects from a policy cascade, it is still crucial to starting to regain control over individual beliefs and classroom practices.

Policy cascades, over time, lead to learned dependency in teachers. The best way for teachers to resist the impact of policy cascades and lessen the degree of learned dependency within them is by developing a critically literate perspective. Critical theory, the basis of a critically literate perspective, rests on the view that human nature exists within a society that is built on power struggles, and which leads to both privilege and oppression intersecting with one another (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2011; Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011). Teachers who develop this perspective will be better equipped to recognize those power struggles in a policy cascade, and enact change within their classrooms. Without a critically literate perspective, teachers continue to be subject to further erosion by policy cascades like the one formed by the Common Core Initiative. Teachers are trained to be decision-makers, and they need to reclaim their roles as knowledgeable professionals in their classroom (Cochran-Smith, 1991). A critically literate teacher is able to combat the effects of policy cascades by taking a stand as an

educator who has the power to interpret policy in the way he or she deems most appropriate for his or her classroom.

Implications for the Literacy Field

The results of this critical ethnography suggest that elementary teachers' decisions about literacy instruction are made under the dominating forces of policy cascades, where the groups above the teachers have more power over literacy instruction than the teachers. As a result, the ideologies of those groups in power significantly impact teachers, causing an erosion of their own knowledge base and beliefs. Consequently, teachers develop a learned dependency, causing them to look to outside sources as the key influences on their planning and instruction and to rely on other people's interpretations of policy or what should be included in a teacher's professional knowledge base. The way to lessen the impact of policy cascades is for teachers to develop a critically literate perspective. In the field of education, it is important for policymakers, district administration, and teachers to understand the ways in which this critical perspective can be developed. In the following section, two approaches to developing this perspective in teachers—teacher education programs and professional development—are presented, as well as areas for further research.

Teacher Education Programs

Teacher education programs at universities can play a significant role in helping future teachers develop a critically literate perspective that will enable them to interpret policy through their own lens, rather than only the lens of the policymakers or district

administration. Teacher educators can resist the pressure to sustain and legitimate the status quo through their approach to teacher preparation (McLaren, 1989).

Unfortunately, many teacher preparation programs do not focus on fostering critical inquiry in preservice teachers (Cochran-Smith, 1991; Mirra & Morrell, 2011). According to McLaren (1989), educational programs are typically designed to create more individuals who will operate within the interests of the state and the policymakers, furthering and sustaining the status quo. Many teacher education programs instead focus on just the foundations of literacy instruction, and do not offer opportunities for university students to critically examine information related to issues in literacy. The International Reading Association (2010) builds this critical perspective into the standards for professional learning and leadership, encouraging teacher educators to provide opportunities for teacher candidates to critique research and educational initiatives and to examine the implication the initiatives have on literacy instruction. One way to help develop this critical perspective in preservice teachers is through the use of problem-posing methods of instruction at the university level.

Problem-posing style of teaching. One of the approaches teacher educators can take when teaching preservice teachers is a problem-posing style, as opposed to "banking education". According to Freire (1970), education, too often, becomes an act of depositing information, or a "banking" concept of education. This consists of teachers being the givers of information to students, who are passive receivers. The student's role is simply to receive and store the information, and never to think critically about reality or actively create meaning from their own experiences (Freire, 1970). This approach

does not have to dominate university classrooms. Instead, faculty in teacher preparation programs can take a problem-posing approach to teaching.

In problem-posing instruction, teachers and students are simultaneously teachers *and* students. There is not a dichotomy of activities between teacher and student. Instead, the teacher presents material to students for their consideration, then reconsiders earlier thoughts based on the students' expression of their reaction and opinion of the material. This pedagogical approach engages students in questioning their world. This idea ties into critical literacy very heavily. Instead of passively receiving and accepting information that is presented, readers taking a critical literacy standpoint are reading and understanding both the word and the world to understand the purpose of a text in order to avoid being manipulated by it (Freire, 1970). In critical literacy, readers are actively involved in the reading process by questioning, examining, or disputing the power relations that exist between readers and authors (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2010). Teacher educators can share current issues and policies related to literacy education with their university students, and allow time for them to question those issues and policies, dialogue with one another about their viewpoints, co-construct understandings of the information, and develop an understanding of the inherent issues of power relations that might exist within those policies.

This can be the most logical and most beneficial place to begin developing a critical perspective in educators. Grossman, Thompson, and Valencia (2002) found that new teachers typically express the beliefs and enact practices that reflect their districts' approaches to literacy instruction. First year teachers are especially susceptible to policy

cascades and being shaped by the influences of others—in either positive or negative ways. If teacher preparation programs can help educators develop a critically literate perspective, it may become more difficult to erode the knowledge base and ideologies of new teachers.

Professional Development and Learning Communities

Professional development in schools, particularly through collaborative professional learning communities, can help develop a more critical perspective in teachers and facilitate a process of shaping individual and group understandings about policy, rather than implementing the state or district's interpretation. Districts can interpret these policies while still allowing opportunities for teachers to learn about and manipulate those interpretations to fit their own worldviews and what they have learned about effective literacy instruction (Grossman & Thompson, 2004). Taking a uniform approach to staff development, where all teachers hear the same messages from a small group of district personnel, limits the perspectives shared on different issues and policies (Anderson, 1987). This can sustain or increase the learned dependency developed in teachers. Instead, professional development should involve opportunities for teachers to share multiple perspectives with colleagues in an effort to develop their own interpretation and understanding of policies and issues.

Taking this collaborative approach is a positive step toward fostering a critically literate perspective in practicing teachers. Ballet, Kelchtermans, and Loughran (2006) shared that when teachers are given a certain degree of freedom to interpret changes in the working environment in schools, they were able to adopt some of the intentions of the

school district while still holding on to their own ideology. Coburn (2001) interviewed and observed eighteen teachers at a school to examine their worldviews, how they taught, and their perspectives of educational reform. She found that the teachers used collaboration with colleagues to begin to make sense of new messages they were receiving about reading instruction. Rather than adopting the beliefs of policymakers or administrators, the teachers shared their worldviews and constructed shared understandings about new policies and information. Through two-way interactions involving top-down mandates as well as bottom-up collective sensemaking (Fullan, 1994), a richer interpretation of policies like Common Core can be constructed.

Reflective approach to teaching and education. Within the professional development work for teachers, there needs to be an element of reflection on the ways that the current social and political climate shape policies and schooling. Freire (1970) used the term "conscientization" to refer to the attempt to use education as a way of consciously shaping the individual and society in general. It is a process of developing a critical awareness, or consciousness, of a person's social reality through the process of reflection and action (what Freire called praxis). The formation of this critical consciousness allows people to question the nature of their historical and social situations in order to be active subjects in the transformation of these situations.

The process of thoroughly reflecting on the way education is shaped by society involves a deep examination, conducted through dialogue, of the power structures in place and the ways in which those power structures are sustained (Freire, 1970). The examination would begin with one's own concept of reality and then extend into the

ideologies that connect to oppression at local and societal levels. Professional learning communities in schools can be excellent opportunities for teachers to begin this process of reflection, both individually and collectively, to try to understand the ways that schools, teachers, students, and the educational system as a whole is shaped by political, social, and cultural ideologies that dominate in that time.

Teacher preparation programs that are focused on critical literacy, in addition to professional development opportunities in schools that allow for interpretation and collaboration among teachers, can help lessen the impact of the policy cascades. The cascades may still be chaotic, but in the chaos, meaningful interpretations can be made that benefit all teachers and students.

Need for Further Research

The Common Core State Standards Initiative is new for all participating states during the 2011-2012 school year. State officials, school district administrators, and classroom teachers are at the beginning stages of interpretation and implementation of this large and significant educational initiative. It is essential for districts to be mindful and cautious about the impacts of policy cascades when making decisions on how to implement the new initiative within schools. A "one size fits all" approach to policy does not take into consideration the academically, linguistically, and culturally diverse classrooms that make up schools across the nation. Common Core may contain a uniform set of standards for students in all states, but the implementation and interpretation need not be uniform. Local knowledge in the remote regions of the west varies greatly from local knowledge in urban east coast cities. This all needs to be held in

high regard when determining what Common Core will look like in individual classrooms.

More research needs to be conducted in the upcoming years as more schools and districts begin to work under the umbrella of Common Core. The current study was conducted at one school site that was not facing the scrutiny that many schools that are on "watch" for not making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) face. The way an initiative like Common Core was implemented at Wayne Rogers could look very different in a school dealing with additional pressures to make AYP. Additionally, this study occurred in the first year of implementation of Common Core. Teachers and district administrators were still making decisions regarding interpretations and implementation of the new initiative. It would be beneficial to conduct further research as teachers at various schools continue the process of understanding Common Core and what it means for teachers and students.

States and districts that are taking a slower approach to implementing the standards will be able to learn from research conducted on the Common Core Initiative and its implementation and apply it to their own educational settings. Policymakers need to be cautious of the policy cascades when determining how to disseminate information to state departments of education and school district administration. More research on the Common Core could provide great insight on what could become the most influential educational reform to date.

Becoming the Rock That Shapes the Cascades

The purpose of this study was to answer the question, how do elementary classroom teachers plan and implement literacy instruction? What was found was that the dominance of outside influences—in most cases, Common Core-- shaped the way teachers planned and taught. The teachers named Common Core as the reason they selected content, the way they developed strategies, and the way they shifted their instructional practices within their classrooms. They relied infrequently on their own knowledge base and training as a professional, and while occasionally mentioning their students, it was the factor they named least often when talking about what they considered when developing lessons and teaching literacy. The teachers were facing the impacts of dominant ideologies at work through the mandated implementation of reform and policy.

Cochran-Smith (1991) refers to teaching with resistance to dominant ideologies as "teaching against the grain". This kind of teaching requires a strong critical perspective with an awareness of the power relations and influence of dominant ideologies embedded within educational policy. It also requires knowledge of the cultural, historical, social, and political contexts in which these policies are created. Apple and Teitelbaum (1986) stated that even well trained teachers could lose their ability and confidence to design and teach well-crafted lessons as a result of the hegemonic implementation of policies in schools. However, teachers can unlearn dependency and be stronger under the deteriorating effects of policy cascades.

Teachers who can resist the erosion of policy cascades are often in the minority (Cochran-Smith, 1991). Teaching this way requires protection from the strength of the cascade, and a way to keep one's own shape despite the rushing forces that flow from the top down. These teachers might find themselves as the lonely voice speaking against teaching practices they believe are not aligned with their own viewpoints, their professional knowledge base, and their understanding of research in the field of literacy. Author Paul Collins (n.d.), when referring to the shape and form of a waterfall, once said, "The bigger stones give it character. The rock is what makes this waterfall." Critically literate, empowered teachers have the potential to become the rock that defines the policy cascade by becoming informed about policy, viewing it with a critical perspective, and regaining the power of a strong, knowledgeable educator who is in charge of professional decisions in the classroom.

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Appendix

Questions for Weekly Debriefing Interviews:

1. How did you plan your literacy instruction for today?

2. What do you think was the biggest influence on your plans for today's lesson?

3. Why did you choose the particular materials you used in the lesson?

4. Did you change instruction at all "in the moment" that was different from your original plans?

   Why?

5. Why did you choose the instructional strategy that you used for today's lesson?

Footnotes

[1]The name of the school site, as well as the names of all participants, are pseudonyms.

[2]In the field of psychology and human development, the term "learned dependency" is sometimes used when referring to individual's dependency on other people for basic care, such as on caregivers (ex: Gardner, D.K. & Helmes, E.E. (2006) Interpersonal dependency in older adults and the risks of developing mood and mobility problems when receiving care at home. *Aging & Mental Health*, 10(1), 63-68.) The term can also at times be applied to cases of individuals with disabilities (ex: Turnbull, H.R. (2005). Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Reauthorization: Accountability and personal responsibility. *Remedial and Special Education*, 26(6), 320-326.) or individuals with autism (see https://www.autismfamilyonline.com/). The use of the term in this study is not to equate educators with individuals with disabilities or individuals with a caregiver. The term is being used in a new way to describe dependence of teachers on outside sources.

Table 1

Background of Participants at Wayne Rogers Elementary School

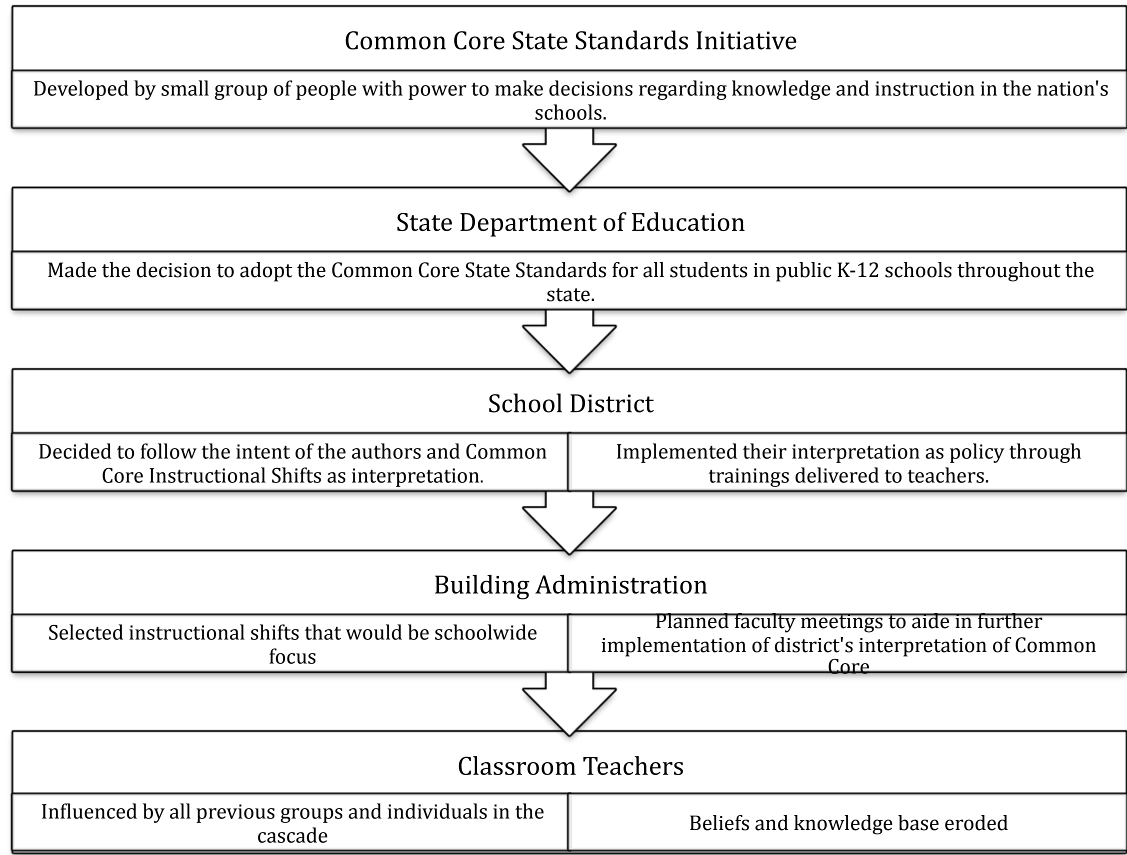
Name (all pseudonyms)	Total Years in Teaching	Total Years at Wayne Rogers Elementary	Grade Level During 2011-2012 School Year	Educational Background
Maggie	16	15	Kindergarten	Elementary Ed/Special Ed; Master's in Literacy
Sharon	7	2	First	Anthropology; Master's in Elementary Ed.
Fran	24	14	Third	Elementary Ed/Special Ed; Master's in Special Ed; Ed. Specialist Degree in School Psychology
Emily	4	4	Fourth	Elementary Ed/Special Ed; final semester of Master's in Literacy program
Nikki	11	6	Fifth	Speech, Communication, and Theater Arts; Elementary Education Teaching Credential; final semester of Master's in Literacy program
Lauren	9	1	Special Education	General Studies; Special Education and General Education Licensure

Table 2

Coding Used in Data Analysis

Code	Meaning of Code
CC	Used when a teacher referenced Common Core Standards or when use of Common Core Standards was observed in classroom
D5	Reference to or observation of Daily Five
HM	Reference to or observation of Houghton Mifflin reading series
CoK	Teachers referred to a part of their own content knowledge
PCK	Teachers referred to or used part of their own pedagogical content knowledge
CuK	Teachers referred to or used part of their own curricular knowledge
StrK	Teachers demonstrated strategic knowledge in classroom
AS	Reference to or observation of assessments
ST	Reference to students
RR	Reference to or observation of Round Robin or Popcorn Reading
50/50	Reference to CC shift to 50% informational text
CC:TD	Reference to or observation of the text dependency shift in CC
WC/SG	Reference to or observation of whole class instruction versus small group instruction
Pink highlight	Reference to or evidence of planning for literacy
Green highlight	Reference to or evidence of instruction of literacy

Figure 1: Policy Cascades of Common Core.



This figure illustrates the effects of the policy cascades in the current study.