Curriculum, Instruction, and the Common Core State Standards

Sharilyn C. Steadman
Chan Evans
East Carolina University

The history of reform efforts designed to improve the American educational system is long and multi-focused. Nearly since its inception, public education's basic tenets, such as purpose, curriculum, pedagogy, access, and assessment, have served as targets for reform. More recently, the past 30 years have seen three major reform efforts shape American educational policy and implementation. The first, *A Nation at Risk,* and the second, the No Child Left Behind Act, were launched and supported by the federal government. The third and current educational reform effort is the Common Core State Standards. Developed under the leadership of the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association (NGA & CCSSO, 2010), this reform is defined as

> 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)

This issue of the *Journal of Curriculum and Instruction* reflects the attention garnered by the implementation of CCSS implementation and other reform efforts and includes articles that address the impact of reform initiative on various aspects of curriculum and instruction.

Research Forum

The research articles that lead this issue explore how school leaders and teachers work together in an effort to bring about school-wide changes that serve the common good of students. In examining Common Planning Time at a middle school and curriculum mapping at a high school, the authors focus on benefits and barriers to implementing local, rather than national or large-scale improvement programs.

Heather Rogers Haverback and Molly Mee present results of a survey that investigated educator perspectives in "Middle School Teachers' Perceptions of the Benefits and Barriers of Common Planning" (2013). This quantitative study focused on one aspect of the National Middle Grades Research Project Common Planning Time Teacher Survey. The authors provide an overview of the Project and its research goals. They then describe the study in which teachers from a school that used a common

planning time (CPT) model completed a self-report instrument by rating statements concerning CPT use in their school. Haverback and Mee report that teachers found three major benefits of CPT and one main barrier to its successful implementation. They conclude by summarizing the value of CPT in middle schools and offer suggestions for expansion of research and implementation.

In the second research article, Tamara Shilling applies the theoretical framework of educational change to one school's reform efforts in "Opportunities and Challenges of Curriculum Mapping Implementation in One School Setting: Considerations for School Leaders" (2013). In this qualitative study of one school's experience in attempting to implement school-wide curriculum mapping, the author examined the complex interplay of faculty and administration as well as the roles both played in launching and maintaining the practice. Based on results from participant semi-structured interviews, standardized test results, curriculum maps, and classroom observations, Shilling identifies essential elements for fostering and retaining this reform and also illuminates factors that impeded the introduction and sustainability of the school-wide curriculum mapping effort.

Perspective

This issue's two perspective articles focus on different but inter-related spheres: students and educational policy. In light of the changing world of classroom education, Carpenter and Pease (2013) reconsider and reconceptualize the skills students need in today's learning environment, while Liebtag (2013) explores the potential promise and shortfalls of the Common Core State Standards.

In "Preparing Students to Take Responsibility for Learning: The Role of Non-Curricular Learning Strategies," Carpenter and Pease (2013) espouse the importance of students taking an active role in their own educational process, and they support this assumption of best practice with an extensive literature review. They begin by providing a rationale for students sharing responsibility of learning with their teachers. They then present three types of non-curricular learning skills that may enhance and promote success in school and beyond: self-regulation, collaboration, and academic mindsets. For each, the authors provide a definition, review relevant research, and give school-based examples of how to incorporate each skill within a classroom setting. They conclude by suggesting that practitioners and researchers pursue practices that have the potential to strengthen student engagement and acumen with non-curricular skills, including providing supportive environments, using various types of formative assessment, and employing the flipped learning model.

In the second perspective piece, "Moving Forward with Common Core State Standards Implementation: Possibilities and Potential Problems," Liebtag (2013) offers an overview of the two major recent standards-based initiatives (the *A Nation at Risk* report and the No Child Left Behind Act), and explores the potential impact and

problems of the Common Core State Standards in relation to two specific areas: the notion of equity and the professional development of both pre-service and in-service teachers. Liebtag recognizes the CCSS's inherent and announced dedication to equity based on adherence to the defined standards regardless of school system, state, or geographic region. She asserts, however, that the CCSS themselves are subject to inequities as a result of the multiplicity of implementation methods. Further, she posits that because the assessments are currently incomplete, their adherence to equity cannot be authentically assessed at this time. Regarding the author's second area of concern, the impact of teachers, Liebtag stresses the need for consistent and well-developed opportunities for the professional development of in-service teachers and a revision of teacher candidate programs to more fully address the skills, knowledge, and perceptions of learners needed to implement the CCSS.

Book Reviews

The book reviews in this issue offer readers three resources that complement the research and perspective pieces. First, Topolka-Jorissen (2013) summarizes companion books by Linda Gross Cheliotes and Marceta Fleming Reilly. The first two chapters of *Coaching Conversations: Transforming Your School One Conversation at a Time* (2010) define the concepts of change and leadership and provide the foundation for the following three chapters that discuss in detail the skills of listening, speaking, and providing reflective feedback, respectively. Embedded within the text are multiple exercises that provide the reader with tools for self-assessment and skills development. Building upon the first book, the sequel, *Opening the Door to Coaching Conversations* (2012), offers a collection of scenarios to facilitate the most common kinds of conversations that populate educator coaching, for example the skills required to engage in difficult conversations and approaches to getting authentic *buy-in* from faculty. Finally, Cheliotes and Reilly provide a helpful matrix to aid in locating specific conversations and situations found within *Opening the Door to Coaching Conversations* and the associated beneficial coaching and leadership skills.

LaDuke, Lindner, and Yanoff (2013) review a collection of essays written by experts in the field of literacy in *Quality Reading Instruction in the Age of Common Core Standards* (Neuman & Gambrell, 2013). The book covers four major aspects of literacy as it relates to the CCSS: early childhood, diverse learners, texts and text complexity, and technology. Topics presented within these sections include: literacy development for young children, English language learners, and underserved students; past research and best practice in instruction; and new digital literacies. Chapters contain practical suggestions for implementation in a *Try This!* segment.

Final Thoughts

Though educational reform is imperative when we strive to implement elements that offer all students enhanced opportunities to learn essential skills and knowledge,

the process can be unsettling. As we move to address the disequilibrium that accompanies change, we recognize the benefits and challenges inherent in growth. The articles and book reviews presented in this issue provide thoughtful insights and findings that may offer support to readers as they encounter their own local and our shared national educational changes.

References

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About the Authors

Sharilyn C. Steadman, PhD, is an assistant professor in the Department of Literacy Studies, English Education, and History Education in the College of Education at East Carolina University. Her research focuses on pre-service teacher development, effective means of supporting the transition from teacher candidate to classroom   teacher, and the use of authentic data to inform program improvement.
E-mail: steadmans@ecu.edu

Chan Evans, PhD, is an associate professor in the Department of Special Education, Foundations, and Research in the College of Education at East Carolina University. Her research interests include academic and behavioral support for students with emotional/behavioral disorders across educational environments, teachers-as-researchers, and universal design for learning.
E-mail: evansru@ecu.edu