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"An Easy Switch": A Descriptive Case Study Exploring the Shift Toward Informational Text Accompanying the Implementation of Common Core State Standards in Five Primary Classrooms

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A Descriptive Case Study Exploring the Shift Toward Informational Text
Accompanying the Implementation of Common Core State Standards
in Five Primary Classrooms

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to discover how the newly implemented Common Core State Standards (CCSS) may have changed teachers' practices and philosophies regarding literacy instruction and to determine which teaching strategies were being presented in regard to informational text in the studied Kindergarten through second grade classrooms.

The research was conducted in five classrooms within one elementary school in the mid-Southern United States. The study design involved semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and teacher-reported lesson plans over a fourteen week data collection period. The aim of this research was to portray a vivid description of the implementation of CCSS and the subsequent changes to the teaching of literacy, with a focus on the increased use of informational text.

The outcome of this study was portrayed through a flowchart which emerged from the data using grounded theory during the final step of data analysis. The key findings from this study were discovered in two areas: (a) change in the classroom and (b) teachers and informational text. It was discovered that (a) teachers will shift their way of teaching if they perceive a positive change in their students, (b) in order to change, teachers must receive support and then provide specific supports to students, and (c) if teachers receive support but do not carry this over into student support, there will not be a noticeable change in their teaching. The result of this classroom change was that the teachers in this study acknowledged that children's curiosity enables teachers to choose informational text for instruction. This was recognized as the easiest part of the switch to CCSS. The teachers also discovered that young students can appropriately utilize informational text for learning and can then transfer that learning to other content areas.

It was anticipated that these authentic descriptions could further understandings on the process of teacher change and bring new insight for those schools considering an increased focus on informational text with young children. The findings confirmed theories presented in other research within the areas of teacher change and informational text interest to support the reading development in young children.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beautiful daughter, Luci Kate Da-In. Every morning I wake up and thank God that I get to be your mommy. You are the most precious gift in the whole world and you make me want to be a better person each and every day!

This dissertation is also dedicated to my wonderful Father and Mother, Bill and Marilyn Fellows. Your unceasing encouragement and unwavering faith got me through this process. I am so thankful for all the days you spent playing with Luci, the endless trips to Fayetteville to help out around the house, and the cards, phone calls, and texts of encouragement along the way. I am blessed beyond measure to be your daughter!

Above all, I dedicate this dissertation and the celebration of this process to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Thank you Lord for blessing me with perseverance, placing the right people in my life to push me when I needed it most, and for giving me the strength to see this through to the end.

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. –Isaiah 40:31

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Informational text is a genre that is often neglected in the early elementary classroom. Kristo and Bamford (2004) define informational text as including a wide array of "expository or non-narrative writing…not only books, but brochures, articles, recipes, newspapers, and selections from Web sites" (p. 13); it is a genre designed to communicate information so the reader might learn something. Duke's (2000) seminal study brought attention to a gap in primary students' reading. When looking at first grade classrooms, she found that on average only 3.6 minutes per day is spent on informational text, with the trend continuing as students progress through the grades. Of those classrooms studied by Jeong, Gaffney, and Choi (2010), less than one minute per day was spent engaged with informational text in second grade, with an average of 16 minutes per day for grades three and four. In addition, an average of 6% of elementary students' reading time was focused on informational content with less than 25% of classroom library materials being informational text in the primary grades (Duke, 2000; Jeong et al., 2010; Pressley, Rankin, & Yokoi, 1996).

Until recently states have been teaching under their own unique set of teaching frameworks, designed by their individual state Education Departments. While some of the frameworks likely are similar there has been no set standard for what is taught in the public school classrooms across our nation; neither have there been state guidelines over classroom literacy materials. States had patterned their frameworks after standards set forth by leading professional organizations such as the International Reading Association but there was still much variation across state lines. In 2007, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

Framework called for 50% informational passages to be embedded in all fourth grade classrooms in order to best prepare students for standardized test passages and for subsequent reading experiences in education (National Assessment Governing Board, 2007). In 2010, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were released with the mandate that all fourth grade classroom reading materials would be composed of 50% narrative text and 50% informational text. To date the CCSS have been adopted in 45 out of 50 states. This is the first collaborative effort regarding educational standards the separate states have embraced. These standards have the potential to change curriculum and instruction in the classroom. A critical look at CCSS reveals these standards are designed to provide all students with a thinking curriculum beginning in the earliest grade, Kindergarten.

Why is this push for more informational text in early elementary classrooms so important? Keene (2008) mentions there has been a growing awareness in the most recent past that informational literacy is the key factor in successful participation in our global society - a society where success in schooling, work, and daily life depends on the ability to comprehend information (Duke, 2004). The world we live in is based on information and most of the text adults encounter on a daily basis is informational in nature (Benson, 2002). Not only do students need to understand where and how to find information, they must also be able to judge the accuracy of that information (Duke, 2010). Prior to the career world and adult life, success in school depends on one's ability to utilize the structures and features of informational text. Saul and Dieckman (2005) point out that 50-85% of passages found on standardized tests are information text. Taking this support into consideration, there should be little debate whether informational text should be included in the early elementary grades; the real question is how.

Personal Experience

The use or nonuse of informational text has been a topic I have been drawn toward for some time. I am especially interested in how this text is used in the early elementary grades, Kindergarten through second grade. My interest began as a public school Kindergarten teacher and a literacy coach where I witnessed little use of informational text in early grades. Based on the conversations I shared with colleagues this lack of interest in informational text was not due to student disinterest but rather to teacher disinterest. Young children have a natural interest in nonfiction, however their early literacy instruction has been traditionally focused on fiction— fantasy, poems, and rhymes. From my past and present observations, grades Kindergarten through second grade have continued to focus on helping students "break the code" or learn to read using these fictional texts. Guillaume (1998) made a case for learning to read using informational text; she suggested learning to read and reading to learn can transpire together: "content area reading is not the sole territory of those who are already proficient readers" (p. 476). There is limited research to support the idea that learning to read and reading to learn are best accomplished separately (Chall, 1983). The infrequent use of informational text in classrooms became a problem when students reached third grade. Traditionally third grade is when students make the shift from learning to read to reading to learn. Many of the students in the school where I taught would struggle with this change in reading purpose because the materials they read for content knowledge were informational text. They had little to no exposure to this text before third grade, and these texts had their own sets of features that students must be taught if they are going to take in all the information the text has to offer.

My interest in this topic was renewed as a college instructor. I witnessed what I believed to be the long term effects of this nonuse of informational text with my junior and senior level

pre-service Childhood and Elementary Education teachers. I began to notice a pattern with each

new group of students that arrived in my classroom; they did not know how to utilize

informational text in an efficient or effective manner. When I would assign a reading from the

text book students would read the main textual portion of the chapter but would neglect the side

bars, the charts, and would skip over bolded terms they were unfamiliar with rather than making

use of the glossary. They were missing some of the key pieces of information from the readings.

Once I realized this, I began taking a portion of class time at the beginning of each semester and

teaching them how to fully use their textbooks. Witnessing this neglect of informational text in

both elementary and post-secondary settings caused me to wonder: Why are teachers in the

lower elementary grades not using informational text with their students, and if they did, could it

make a difference long-term?

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural theory states that people learn not through passing a body of knowledge

from one individual (teacher) to another (student) but through guided participation in socially

constructed activities (Bruner, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). Learning is a collective activity that takes

place in environments where social interaction is encouraged and valued. People learn through

participation in activities and conversations with those who are more knowledgeable regarding a

particular topic than oneself. From this perspective, learning about informational texts has to do

with how students participate in and are scaffolded into particular textual categories and features

specific to such texts.

Piaget (1973, 1976) in his Constructivist theory also contends that learning takes place

through participation with knowledge. To fully learn about a topic, learners must be immersed

within this topic and use what is available to them to construct their own knowledge; to either

assimilate this new learning into their own set of schemas or accommodate this learning into a new schema. From this viewpoint, it would seem important for students to have access to informational texts and have time to engage with these texts in a knowledgeable and supportive environment in order to construct their own understanding regarding how best to utilize this genre in their own lives.

Walter Loban (1976) realized the role of informational text in children's literacy and language development. He stated the importance of using concept books with young children and taking advantage of their natural curiosity by giving them access to texts that would assist them in answering their questions about the natural world.

Rosenblatt (1994) theorizes that each reading experience will fall somewhere on the "Efferent-Aesthetic Continuum" with efferent reading focusing on reading for the purpose of extracting information and aesthetic reading focusing on reading for the pleasure of the experience (p. 1066). Richgels (2002) noted the mutual reinforcement of reading for enjoyment and for information as a benefit of using narrative alongside nonfiction texts with young students. He argues that children read for the enjoyment of learning, and multiple genres have the ability to provide an array of learning opportunities. Expanding students' access to and instruction with informational text in the primary grades may leverage academic learning in later elementary and middle school grades by providing opportunities for building prior knowledge of the world, vocabulary, and text structures (Jeong et al., 2010). Taken a step further, prior knowledge of a subject matter is actively used by fluent readers to predict, confirm, and generate understanding. This being said, students need a body of subject area knowledge to draw upon when reading in order to progress through the stages of reading development to the fluency stage. Much of this body of knowledge comes from informational text (Goodman, 1976).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to discover what, if any, teaching strategies were being presented in regard to informational text in Kindergarten through second grade classrooms. I also described how the newly implemented CCSS may have changed teachers' practices and philosophies regarding the teaching of literacy. In addition, I determined how often informational text was being used and if any informational text strategies discussed in the following review of literature were currently in place in the studied Kindergarten through second grade classrooms.

Research Questions

Central Question

- How are informational texts used, read, and incorporated into these Kindergarten, first, and second grade classrooms in this new realm of CCSS?

Guiding Sub Questions

- How has the implementation of CCSS changed literacy teaching practices or philosophies?

- In what ways do the teachers support students' developing understandings about informational texts?

- In what ways do teachers provide opportunities for students to engage with informational text?

- In what ways do teachers draw attention to informational text features?

Definitions

  Case study: Case study research is a familiar research approach to social scientists and has been widely used throughout history in psychology, law, political science, medicine, and more recently education. Creswell (2007) defines case study as research involving the "study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context)" (p. 73). This case study involved five teachers from one school, Kindergarten through second grade as well as that school's instructional facilitator.

  Common Core State Standards (CCSS): A set of educational standards representing the culmination of an extended, broad-based effort by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) to fulfill the request made by individuals at the state level to create the next generation of K–12 standards in order to help ensure that all students are "college and career ready" no later than the end of high school. "CCSS are (a) research and evidence based, (b) aligned with college and work expectations, (c) rigorous, and (d) internationally benchmarked" (NGA & CCSSO, 2010).

  English Language Learner (ELL): "An active learner of the English language who may benefit from various types of language support programs" (National Council of Teachers of English, 2008). This term is typically used to describe K-12 students and replaces previously used terms English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

  Informational text: This genre includes a wide array of "expository or non-narrative writing…not only books, but brochures, articles, recipes, newspapers, and selections from Web sites" (Kristo & Bamford, 2004, p. 13); it is a genre designed to communicate information so the reader might learn something. It is referred to as many names throughout the literature –

nonfiction, expository, non-narrative, or informational. For the purpose of this case study I will use the term informational text.

Low income school: A school in which at least 40% of families are classified as low income, meaning their taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150% of the poverty level amount for that year. For 2012, a family of four must exceed $34,575 to be free of this classification (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Significance of the Study

I believe the research completed in this descriptive case study is timely with the changing focus of our educational system, the new implementation of CCSS, and the changes required of teachers moving through this change. Never before has such an emphasis been placed on informational text in the early elementary grades. As Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman (2012) stated we can look at the CCSS as a burden or as if they are a golden opportunity. I choose to look at them as gold melted together and mixed with a dose of reality. If implemented correctly, these standards could change the way our classrooms function, the methods teachers use, and the manner in which students think and learn.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following literature review looks at informational text in elementary schools in the context of what research has to say about where education is today, how it arrived at this point in time, and what this means for teachers. First, I present a research analysis about informational text in the history of American education. Second, I review information about why nonfiction is scarce in most early elementary classrooms. This is followed by an examination of the changing focus in our educational system as well as an explanation of the teacher change process. I then discuss the structure of CCSS and present current informational text teaching practices as well as suggestions for what we should be doing. Finally, I provide an analysis of the potential impacts and consequences of this shifting focus toward informational text.

Informational Text in American Educational History

The idea of providing students with instruction using informational text is not a new one, and there was actually a point in our history where informational text had a place of prominence in primary classrooms. In 1776, at the time of the birth of our nation, children's texts were primarily religious selections. Immediately following the Revolutionary War many passages were written to emphasize national pride, unification, and citizenship, while other selections were written for the purpose of instructing children about their environment, affairs of the country, and the structure of the new democracy (Duke, Bennett-Armistead, & Roberts, 2003). Informational text again became popular with the rise of industrialism; McGuffey readers offered nature-based texts and histories, and Wilson's *School and Family* series gave specific attention to scientific study (Smith, 1986).

The shift away from informational text in classrooms began at the end of the nineteenth century when Charles Eliot, president of Harvard University, called for the elimination of readers

in favor of literature. His argument was that children should be exposed to quality reading material rather than the watered down stories offered in readers. More than any other influence, this event shifted early reading materials toward literature and away from informational text (Venezky, 2000). William S. Gray, a pioneer in education, again emphasized the importance of content area literacy *in all grades* as early as 1925 (Moss, 2005), however an analysis completed by Smith (1986) of the ten most popular primers published in the 1920s show that no pages in any primer were devoted to informational text. Smith also reported that beyond limited exceptions during the twentieth century, informational text remained rare in materials used for beginning reading instruction.

The literature illustrates that researchers have been continually aware of the need to embed more informational text into reading instruction. While the frequency of research published regarding this topic was intermittent in the later years of the twentieth century, it has increased dramatically during the beginning of the twenty-first century (Armbruster, 1992; Moss, 2005). Armbruster (1992) reviewed *The Reading Teacher* during the years spanning 1969 to 1991 and she found 24 full length articles related to informational text during this 22 year span. Moss (2005), likewise, reviewed this same journal from May 2000 to May 2004 and found 15 articles on the same topic in that four year span alone - more than half as many as appeared during Armbruster's analysis ending only nine years earlier.

The literature reviewed offers many suggestions as to why informational text is once again gaining in popularity. Norton (2011) reviewed how informational text is developmentally appropriate for young children in regard to their language and cognitive development. She states that young children enjoy asking questions such as *why* and *how* as well as learning about everyday occurrences that impact their world. Informational text is designed to answer these

questions and provide background information to pique their natural curiosities. Young children moving through Piaget's cognitive concrete operational stage need opportunities to interact with text allowing them to see, discuss, and verify information and relationships.

The increased pressure on children to perform well on standardized testing is another reason for the renewed interest in informational text (Duke, 2010; Saul & Dieckman, 2005). State assessments have been created based on each state's instructional frameworks and patterned after the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP). Students typically begin taking these assessments in third or fourth grade. The NAEP expectation for a proficient score at the fourth grade level involves reading information from articles and books as well as the ability to think critically in regards to these texts as illustrated in the quote below (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011):

> …fourth grade students performing at the *Proficient* level should be able to locate relevant information, integrate information across texts, and evaluate the way an author presents information. Student performance at this level should demonstrate an understanding of the purpose for text features and an ability to integrate information from heading, text boxes, graphics and their caption. They should be able to explain a simple cause-and-effect relationship and draw conclusions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011, p. 28).

This focus on informational text on standardized tests and the realities of our changing global society has led to the release and adoption of the CCSS, which will eventually replace many states' individual instructional frameworks (Calkins et al., 2012; NGA & CCSSO, 2010).

Why has informational text rarely been used in primary classrooms?

Historically, the use of informational text in elementary schools begins in third or fourth grade when students make the switch from learning-to-read to reading-to-learn (Chall, 1983; Duke et al., 2003; Moss, 2005); little informational text has been used prior to this benchmark.

The absence of informational text prior to fourth grade has been blamed for what Chall & Jacobs (2003) label the fourth grade slump, which is the common description for the decline in reading achievement once students make the switch from primarily narrative reading to more heavy informational reading.

Duke (2000) studied 20 first grade classrooms and discovered that on average only 3.6 minutes each day is spent on informational text. In addition, only 6% of elementary students' reading time was focused on informational content. The scenario is even more bleak for those children who attend schools with a high percentage of free and reduced lunches wherein only 6% of their books were informational text, and a mere 1.4 minutes per day was spent directly engaged with this genre. Jeong et al. (2010) found similar results when they studied reading materials in second, third, and fourth grade classrooms. Classroom libraries were inventoried as the researchers believed this was a good indicator of the teachers' perceptions of the importance of balancing various text genres. The proportion of informational text present in classrooms was slightly higher in second grade than in third or fourth grade with classroom libraries containing about 25% informational text. However, it was discovered that less than one minute of each day's instructional time in grade two was spent engaged in informational text whereas third and fourth grade was slightly better with an average of 16 minutes per day of instructional time.

The research illuminated three unsupported beliefs as the underlying cause for this lack of informational text in primary grades. The first was that young children cannot truly understand and utilize informational text (Duke et al., 2003). Duke and Kays (1998) disproved this myth by examining Kindergarteners' reactions to informational text after three months of exposure to this genre. The researchers found that the children not only were more familiar with the structure of informational text after three months, but also incorporated more verb

constructions, generic noun constructions, repetitions of a topical theme, informational-book-like

beginnings, comparative/contrastive and classification structures, and technical vocabulary.

Another study conducted by Purcell-Gates, Duke, and Martineau (2007) followed several second

grade students as they transitioned into third grade, and found that these students were engaged

in abundant opportunities to read and write informational text for authentic purposes. This study

suggests primary students can acquire the structures and features particular to informational texts

at the same time they are learning the content presented, and are even motivated to do so.

The next unsupported belief (Duke et al., 2003) states young children do not like

informational text, or at the very least they prefer other forms of text. This belief has been stated

in various studies as one of the reasons that so many teachers avoid the use of informational text

in the classroom (Duke, 2000; Saul & Dieckman, 2005). When presented with the choice

between a narrative text and an informational text on the same topic, most teachers predict their

students will choose the narrative story. However, when the students are asked to make the

choice, children in grades one through three will choose informational text as often as narrative

text with boys choosing informational text more often than narratives.

The final unsupported belief (Duke et al., 2003) states young children should first learn to

read and then around fourth grade make the switch into reading to learn. However, there is no

evidence that children cannot read to learn earlier than fourth grade. The work of Pappas (1991;

1993) countered the widely perceived belief that narrative structure should precede

understanding of informational structure. The body of reading research supports the fact that

students use what they are exposed to, and informational text may actually be the key to assisting

struggling readers (Casbergue & Plauche, 2003). Informational text helped struggling readers

because the students found text on topics that interested them, which enticed the students to read more. The more practice students have in reading, the better their abilities become.

Many studies in which teachers were interviewed regarding their choice of genres in the classroom revealed a prevalent belief that narrative text is easier to read than informational text because of the shared story structure ubiquitous in narrative stories as well as the common topics, language, and vocabulary comfortable to children (Duke, 2000; Jeong et al., 2010; Saul & Dieckman, 2005). However, Kamil & Lane (1997) studied several first grade classrooms and found those classes that demonstrated the highest reading achievement in the context of the classroom were those in which narrative and informational text were used in the same proportion. Students with varying academic abilities were capable of comprehending informational text and using it to support their writing.

Research indicates that the absence of informational text may be due to the fact that many teachers prefer fiction themselves and make the assumption that their young students will as well (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Donovan & Smolkin, 2001; Duke, 2000). These same studies also found that teachers often think their students will not be able to grasp the concepts presented in nonfiction and will become disengaged. Still others believe that the way in which the information is presented will bore their students (Donovan & Smolkin, 2001; Saul & Dieckman, 2005). Duke (2000) discovered the opposite to be true. Informational reading is engaging for young students and actually motivates them to want to read more (Duke, 2000). It capitalizes on their interests and curiosities, answers questions, and leads students to want to delve deeper into topics (Duke, 2000).

Changing Focus

At the time of this study, 45 out of the 50 US states had adopted CCSS (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). However, many controversies were brewing regarding the implementation of these standards. As late as May 2013 Indiana had halted the implementation of CCSS and similar action was being discussed in at least four other states (Strauss, 2013). The reason cited for this stall was that further discussion was needed on the quality and impact of CCSS.

It is certain that with or without CCSS the US educational system and the world students live in today is changing. Keene (2008) mentions there has been a growing awareness in the most recent past that informational literacy is the key factor in successful participation in our global society - a society where success in schooling, work, and daily life depends on the ability to comprehend information (Duke, 2004).   Furthermore, we live in an information-based world where most of what we read daily is informational text (National Assessment Governing Board, 2007). The amount of information we now confront on a daily basis is more than most people came in contact with during their entire lifetime only 100 years ago (Benson, 2002). Students need to understand where and how to find information in order to survive (Duke, 2010). In addition to the outside world, survival in our school communities requires being able to find and decipher facts in a critical way. Saul and Dieckman (2005) point out that 50-85% of passages found on standardized tests are information text. They propose one of the reasons students in the United States struggle with the literacy portions of these tests is they are not exposed to this genre in early elementary classrooms. The paucity of opportunity to learn about textual structures and features of informational text is leaving our students at a distinct disadvantage in testing (Maloch, 2008).

The International Reading Association's Standards for Reading Professionals (Professional Standards and Ethics Committee of the International Reading Association, 2010) are clear on the expectations for classroom teachers of reading. In Standard Five, classroom teachers are expected to "create a literate environment." This includes the expectation that teachers are able to use students' interests, reading abilities, and backgrounds as foundations for the reading and writing program. To demonstrate their proficiency in this task, teachers must understand how to select materials for instruction and assist students as they self-select materials to match their interests, reading levels, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Standard Five also requires teachers to use a large variety of books that match students' interests from a wide variety of genres. In addition, Standard Five requires teachers to model reading and writing as lifelong skills. To do this, teachers must model how to use reading and writing for real purposes in daily life.

Danielson (2007), whose work is used in many states as a teacher evaluation instrument, states that teachers should plan activities and assignments in their classrooms designed to promote learning. These learning activities have three characteristics in common; they (a) emphasize thinking and problem-based learning, (b) permit choice and initiative, and (c) encourage depth rather than breadth. These components are all supported in the research as features of informational text teaching either in structure or in regard to motivation (Casbergue & Plauche, 2003; Duke, 2000; Maloch, 2008).

In 2007, the NAEP Framework called for 50% informational passages to be embedded in all fourth grade classrooms (National Assessment Governing Board, 2007). In 2010, CCSS were released with the mandate that all fourth grade classroom reading materials would be composed of 50% narrative text and 50% informational text (NGA & CCSSO, 2010). The debate is no

longer should we include informational text in our elementary classrooms, the question has become how best do we incorporate informational text into the classroom.

Process of Teacher Change

The changes to the educational system will require teachers to go through their own change process. Guskey (1986; 2002) states that in order for change to be adopted in a teacher's methods, attitudes, and beliefs a change must be observed in their students' learning outcomes. It is not enough to explain why something should change. If a change is to occur, teachers must see the value in their own classroom; included within this type of change is the use of new materials, curriculum, and methods. If positive student outcomes are observed as a result of changes in the classroom, these changes should reinforce the new learning for the teachers and provide them with motivation to continue with the change. In this model of teacher change, practices that are found successful are retained and are more likely to reoccur.

Change is reported as more difficult to obtain and maintain if a teacher has a significant number of years of experience (Sarason, 1996; Smith-Crispin & Gillespie, 2007). However, the larger factor in teacher change seems to be the teachers' states as learners and their levels of self-efficacy. The *entrenched* (suspicious of change) and *withdrawn* (actively opposed to change) teachers compete against change and new ideas regardless the outcome seen by others (Joyce, 1983).

This leads to the question of meaningful professional development and how those sessions should be structured. Guskey (2002) noted that the change in teacher attitudes, practices, and beliefs could take considerable time and energy. He presented several models for professional development. Putnam and Borko (2000) reported that the most viable place for new teacher learning to occur is in the classroom itself. Their study found that teachers often

complain that traditional professional development that occurs outside the classroom is too removed from their real world context to be of lasting value. Guskey (1986; 2002) concurred and added that in addition to meaningful training in the classrooms, teachers must continue to receive consistent and meaningful feedback, both from trainers and from students.

Common Core Structure

The CCSS take the stance that any student mastering the content and skills listed in the document will be college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school:

> Students who meet the Standards readily undertake the close, attentive reading that is at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex works of literature. They habitually perform the critical reading necessary to pick carefully through the staggering amount of information available today in print and digitally. They actively seek the wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational text that builds knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens worldviews. They reflexively demonstrate the cogent reasoning and use of evidence that is essential to both private deliberation and responsible citizenship in a democratic republic. In short, students who meet the Standards develop the skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening that are the foundation for any creative and purposeful expression in language (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p. 3).

Calkins et al. (2012) states the standards represent the most sweeping reform in K-12 education this country has ever seen. This document will play an influential role in American schools. CCSS (NGA & CCSSO, 2010) emphasizes much higher levels of comprehension than previous standards. These standards also place equal weight on reading and writing, whereas the National Reading Panel Report (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000) did not include writing at all in the five literacy essentials. Also, CCSS stresses the importance of critical citizenship and critical thinking. These standards also emphasize reading complex texts *independently*. They state that cognitive and intellectual growth occurs through time, across years, and across disciplines which will require cross-curricular literacy teaching. No longer is literacy teaching only the job of the elementary or English/literacy teacher; all

content area teachers are expected to integrate literacy skills into their area of expertise. Finally, the CCSS places the responsibility for curriculum development and teaching back on classroom teachers, thus showing teachers respect and acknowledging their professional judgment.

The English Language Arts (ELA) Standards for CCSS begin with ten College and Career Readiness (CCR) Anchor Standards for Reading. The remainder of the standards for each grade level defines what students should understand and be able to do by the end of each grade. Each set of grade level standards is designed to correspond with the ten anchor standards, and students within each grade are expected to meet each standard and "retain or further develop skills and understandings mastered in preceding grades" (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p. 11).

There are ten Reading Standards for Literature in each grade Kindergarten through fifth grade and ten Reading Standards for Informational Text in each grade Kindergarten through fifth grade. The ten standards in each of these two areas are broken down into four categories that correspond to the CCR Anchor Standards: (a) Key Ideas and Details, (b) Craft and Structure, (c) Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, and (d) Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity. A close comparison of the ELA Reading Standards for Kindergarten through second grade (NGA & CCSSO, 2010) reveals many similarities among the Literature and Informational Text requirements. Teachers are familiar with methods and comprehension strategies used to teach literature which leads to some optimism that this will make the transition toward utilizing more informational text smoother (Calkins et al., 2012; Moss, 2004). Standard 1, which addresses questioning the text, is identical for both sets of Reading Standards. Standard 2 only differs in that for Literature Kindergarten through second grade students are asked to retell familiar stories, and for Informational Text students are asked to identify main topic and retell key details. Standard 3 is nearly identical; the only change between the Literature and Informational Text

Standards is identifying elements specific to each genre, such as character and setting for

Literature and events and ideas for Informational Text. Standard 4, addressing students' ability

to ask and answer questions about unknown words and identify how these words are relevant to

the text, is again identical for both the Literature and Informational Text Standards. Standard 5

involves recognizing different texts and using features of those texts appropriately. It only

differs in type of text used and characteristics specific to that text's purpose. Standard 6 is

identical in both sets of Standards for Kindergarten; it becomes different in first and second

grade when students are asked to determine information specific to the genre they are reading

and the features of that particular text. Standard 7 is identical across Literature and

Informational Text Standards for both Kindergarten and first grade; the difference arrives in

second grade when students are asked to use illustrations in Literature to gain information and

text features such as diagrams in Informational Text to clarify meaning. Standard 8 is

nonexistent in the Literature Standards saying it is "not applicable to literature" (p. 11). When

referencing the CCR Anchor Standards, this standard asks students to validate reasoning,

relevance, and sufficiency of evidence; this is more suited to Informational Text which aligns

with the requirements for Kindergarten through second grade students in the Informational Text

Standards. Standard 9 asks students to compare and contrast information found in books aligned

with each of the respective genres. Standard 10 is identical in both sets of standards and deals

with the requirement that students will read appropriately complex text in each of the genres for

their assigned grade level. It is interesting to note that beginning in second grade, students are

asked to read and comprehend texts of various genres in the second *and third grade* text

complexity band.

Current Teaching Practices and What We Should Be Doing

Throughout the research, it has been noted that the most common instructional activities in elementary classrooms for informational text were to complete a worksheet or participate in round-robin reading (Duke, 2000; Jeong et al., 2010), both of which have been heavily questioned as best practice (Allington, 2009; Cooper, Chard, & Kiger, 2006; Rasinski & Hoffman; 2003; Tompkins, 2010). While these were the practices most frequently observed, several other studies gave suggestions for more engaging practices and effective strategies to have students use with informational text, especially in this changing era of the CCSS Informational Text Standards.

Duke (2004) proposes four strategies primary teachers should use to help students improve their comprehension with informational texts. The first and second are simply to increase the access to and amount of time students spend with informational texts, especially with regards to instructional activities. Not only should the texts be present, they should also be heavily promoted by the teacher (Maloch, 2008). Duke also recommends that teachers explicitly teach comprehension strategies including information on what the strategy is, when it is used, how it is used, and why it is worth using. Finally, teachers must create opportunities for students to use informational texts for authentic purposes (Duke, Purcell-Gates, Hall, & Tower, 2006; Professional Standards and Ethics Committee of the International Reading Association, 2010; Purcell-Gates & Duke, 2003; Purcell-Gates et al., 2007).

Read-alouds are common ways to introduce and expose primary students to different texts and their structure. Primary teachers are encouraged to read aloud from interesting informational texts for at least 20-30 minutes daily (Reutzel & Cooter, 2012). While independent reading needs to be with texts on a level appropriate for the student, read-alouds can

be done with texts at higher reading levels because of the support provided by the teacher (Maloch, 2008). Walker, Kragler, Martin, and Arnett (2003) recommend these read-aloud experiences include teacher supported modeling and supported examination and exploration of texts followed by independent exploration of different types of informational texts. These multiple readings of a text are shown to increase reading fluency and lead to better comprehension of that text.

Moss (2005) mentions that at the primary level students need at least one-third of their reading instruction to be with informational texts; this speaks to instruction on top of exposure and access. Students need instruction in common informational text structures such as sequence, description, causation, problem and solution, and compare and contrast (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000). Students who learn to use the organization and structure of informational texts are more readily capable of comprehending and retaining the information found in these texts (Duke & Pearson, 2002; Williams, 2005). An elaborate interrogation is one technique well suited to primary students to assist them in generating and answering questions in informational texts with the purpose of increasing comprehension. Students are encouraged to ask and answer their own questions while linking information into a network of schemas (Harvey & Goudvis, 2000; Mills, 2009). Students also need explicit instruction regarding informational text features (Maloch, 2008). This explicit teaching should take the form of supported encounters such as teacher modeling and think-alouds, as well as direct explanation and discussion.

Because of the importance of comprehension and strategy instruction in the primary grades, Kindergarten teachers need to lay the foundation for their students to be able to use a variety of strategies as they prepare their students to read more complex text (Pappas, 1993; Richgels, 2002). Martin and Kragler (2012) studied Kindergarteners and their ability to self-

regulate print using both narrative and informational texts. Even though some studies (e.g.,

Smolkin & Donovan, 2001) suggest that comprehension strategy instruction should not be taught

at such an early age, Martin and Kragler discovered that through this comprehension instruction

Kindergarten students made significantly more comments while reading informational text than

narrative text. In addition, Kindergarteners reported they used the pictures to help with their

understanding of the text more with informational text, and made more references to 'reading' as

a way to make meaning with informational text.

The CCSS requires students to read in a highly analytical mode, where the reader must

read for much more than information. Teachers will need to approach informational text not as

an "object of inquiry, but an avenue for inquiry" (Maloch, 2008, p. 352). It has become

necessary for students to understand how a text conveys and persuades readers of claims and

points of view (Calkins et al., 2012). This will require a paradigm shift in the way we teach

students to read and comprehend text. No longer is comprehension one small item in a list of

five literacy elements to be taught in the elementary classroom (National Institute of Child

Health and Human Development, 2000) but rather one look through the K-2 CCSS Reading

Standards alone reveals that a much stronger emphasis on higher-level comprehension skills will

become a major focus of instruction.   Young students are asked to analyze multiple texts, note

similarities and differences in the points of view presented, and assess the validity behind

people's ideas. They are asked to integrate information from several texts and use this

information to explain relationships between ideas and author's craft (NGA & CCSSO, 2010).

Impacts and Consequences

According to the research, there are many benefits and consequences that come along

with increased reading and instruction of informational texts. The review of literature did not

share any negative consequences. Rosenblatt (1994) theorizes that each reading experience will fall somewhere on the "Efferent-Aesthetic Continuum" with efferent reading focusing on reading for the purpose of extracting information and aesthetic reading focusing on reading for the pleasure of the experience (p. 1066). Her theory is applied in Richgels's (2002) work where he noted the mutual reinforcement of reading for enjoyment and for information as a benefit of using narrative alongside nonfiction texts with Kindergarteners. His study found that children read for the enjoyment of learning, and multiple genres have the ability to provide an array of learning opportunities. Expanding students' access to and instruction with informational text in the primary grades may leverage academic learning in later elementary and middle school grades by providing opportunities for building prior knowledge of the world, vocabulary, and text structures (Jeong et al., 2010). Such knowledge of informational text as well as the continued experience with narrative text can only serve to strengthen a student's reading experience and academic learning.

Saul and Dieckman (2005) state that "motivation and engagement are recurrent themes" when it comes to informational text reading and teaching (p. 506). Children learn by reading and they are more likely to read when they find an interesting and engaging text (Casbergue & Plauche, 2003). Caswell and Duke (1998) have even argued that informational texts could serve as a catalyst for literacy development in struggling readers and diverse learners. Wider reading also contributes to increased fluency and comprehension. Furthermore, Kamil and Lane (1997) found that much of what the students in their study read was actually above their grade level when it came to informational texts.   These students were able to demonstrate learned strategies for dealing with complicated informational text to aid in their reading and comprehension of said texts.

It is also argued in many studies that these informational texts provide additional real world experience and authentic exposure to complex vocabulary, and may serve well as an effective means of increasing students' ability to read, write, and speak (NGA & CCSSO, 2010; Duke & Kays, 1998; Saul & Dieckman, 2005). These texts could also lead to a deeper understanding of content through increased background knowledge (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003). Informational texts can draw students more fully into real world experiences, build background knowledge, enhance comprehension, teach concepts, and introduce vocabulary related to unfamiliar topics.

Norton (2011) lists additional benefits and values associated with reading informational texts. Beyond simply gaining knowledge, informational texts also provide opportunities for primary grade students to experience excitement over new discoveries. They also encourage self-reliance and can motivate students to make further investigations. Informational texts can develop critical reading and thinking skills as well as encourage students to stretch their minds and observational powers. These texts can also inform their readers about values, beliefs, and lifestyles other than their own. Norton states that one of the "greatest values in informational books is enjoyment, which is often the primary reason children read informational literature" (p. 496).

Conclusion

In the preceding review of literature I began with the history of informational text in the context of American Education. I discovered that informational text played a central role in elementary education until the end of the nineteenth century. This genre is coming to the forefront of instructional best practice again with the approaching implementation of the CCSS by the majority of American states. This review also shed light on what research has to say

about the motives for teachers' prominent use of narrative text rather than an equal proportion of narrative and informational text as the NAEP and CCSS require. The changing focus of our global society and the American educational system was discussed in detail. This discussion brought to light the disservice we are doing our students in not instructing them using informational texts, and how this absence has set them back in their reading and writing abilities in the higher elementary grades and beyond. I also provided a review of principal organizations' teacher standards and what these standards and protocols say in relation to what teachers should be doing with informational text. Following this discussion, I reviewed the process of teacher change. Then the structure of CCSS was dissected as to what the Kindergarten through second grade standards expect from teachers and students in the area of Literature and Informational Text and how these standards are designed to change the way teachers instruct students. Much of the research reviewed supported the use of informational text in primary classrooms and suggested many strategies to be used when teaching informational text comprehension, structure, and features. It is noted that in many classrooms where informational text is being used with students best practices are not being implemented. Finally, I discussed potential impacts and consequences this changing focus toward more balance in text genres might have on teachers and students.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

The purpose of this study was to discover what teaching strategies were being presented in regard to informational text in the studied Kindergarten through second grade classrooms as well as how often those teachers were using them. I also described how the newly implemented CCSS have changed teachers' practices and philosophies regarding the teaching of literacy. Due to the purpose of this study, I chose to use a descriptive case study as my research method.   My bounded case was the pre-high-stakes testing grades in one elementary school in the mid-South and involved five teachers, two each from Kindergarten and first grade as well as one from second grade.

Tradition of Case Study Research

According to Creswell (2007), a case study is research involving "the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system" (p. 73). The type of case study used here was a descriptive case study which is used to describe a phenomenon in the real world context in which it occurred (Yin, 2003). The bounded system in this case study was the pre-high-stakes testing grades in the elementary school where the five teachers were employed. Case study research uses extended, first-hand data collected from the natural environment of the bounded system and analyses those data for emerging themes and ideas in order to better explain the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon studied.

I agree with much of the research available (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 2003) in that case study is a methodology rather than just a choice of what is to be studied (Stake, 2005). Case study research has a long history of being used across multiple disciplines including psychology, medicine, law, and political science (Creswell, 2007). More recently it has been used in social science in the fields of anthropology, sociology, and education (Hamel,

Dufour, & Fortin, 1993). Historically case studies have been qualitative in nature, yet Yin

(2003) describes case study approaches involving both qualitative and quantitative methods.

This case study, however, took a strictly qualitative approach.

Philosophical Assumptions

Creswell (2007) discusses several philosophical assumptions of qualitative research. The

three that most closely guided this study were ontology (reality is subjective and can be seen

differently by each participant in the study), axiology (research is based on the values and biases

of the researcher), and methodology (inductive logic is employed, topic is studied in context, and

design is emerging).

Qualitative research is interpretive and is guided by the researcher's beliefs and feelings

about the world and their ideas about how it should be studied. Each researcher holds central to

them a research paradigm that shapes their ideals regarding the world around them. The research

paradigm I most closely align with is that of constructivist/interpretive (Guba & Lincoln, 2007).

The constructivist/interpretive paradigm lends itself naturally to case study research in that it

tends to focus on local and specific co-constructed realities that are subjective and often told

through the words of the participants themselves.

Research Setting

The context in which learning occurs is essential to that learning and cannot be detached

from it (Vygotsky, 1978). With this in mind I chose to study the ways in which teachers teach

using informational text and the ways in which students learn from this medium in its natural

environment, the classroom.

The school (pseudonym, Cardinal Elementary) for this case study was purposively

chosen because of the relationship I already had with the teachers in the school (see Credentials

and Biases of the Researcher later in this chapter). I was most interested in studying the use of informational text in grades K through second because of the scarcity of use for this age group in the literature and what research says about the importance of early introduction. I also decided to look specifically at this grade range because they were in their second year of full implementation with CCSS whereas other elementary grades were just beginning this phase.

Cardinal Elementary is on the east side of a city with a population of 71,397 as of 2011. The school district is the second largest in this mid-south state with a total of 18,801 students for the 2012-2013 school year. Cardinal Elementary is one of 17 elementary schools in the district and houses prekindergarten through fifth grade. This school had 573 students for the 2012-2013 school year. Tables 1 through 3 compare the race/ethnicity percentages, the meal status percentages, and the school program percentages respectively for the school district as a whole with Cardinal Elementary. Table 1 reflects the most recent statistics for the 2012-2013 school year. Tables 2 and 3 represent the statistics for the 2011-2012 school year. The tables illustrate the challenges faced by the administration and faculty at this school with regard to the population served in this elementary school. What is not evident in the tables is the fact that out of the 573 students who attend Cardinal Elementary, only eight of those students do not receive any type of service (i.e. special education, ELL, gifted and talented, free or reduced lunch) from the state or school district.

However, Cardinal Elementary is more than the sum of its demographics. This school is situated in a close community and I drive by the houses and apartment complexes where the children live to get to the school. Most of the students walk to and from school as I witnessed depending on whether I was visiting at the beginning or end of the school day; there are only

three school buses that service this school and a handful of after school care vans. This is very much a community school.

The school building is one of the oldest buildings in the district but it is cheerful and warm on the inside. The halls are painted in muted colors and there are windows to each of the classrooms in the hallways. The classrooms, while not large, are adequately and comfortably furnished and it is clear the teachers have made good use of the space they have been given. The school had an addition built on three years ago which houses a new library, computer lab, and classroom for a grant-funded family literacy program for the non-English speaking parents of the students in the school.

There are two administrators at Cardinal Elementary and it is not uncommon to find them in the classrooms rather than in their offices. They greet the students by name in the hallway and are quick to offer specific words of encouragement and comforting hugs. The halls of Cardinal Elementary are as much a community as is the outside world surrounding the school campus.

Table 1

Race/Ethnicity Percentages for School District Compared with Cardinal Elementary for the 2012-2013 School Year

Race Ethnicity	School District Percentage[1]	Cardinal Elementary Percentage[2]
Caucasian	42.86	12.91
Hispanic	42.59	51.83
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	8.31	29.49
Two or More	1.51	0.52
Asian	1.87	1.75
African American	2.33	3.14
Native American or Native Alaskan	0.53	0.35

[1]2012-2013 School District Enrollment was 18,801.
[2]2012-2013 Cardinal Elementary Enrollment was 573.

Table 2

Meal Status Percentage for School District Compared with Cardinal Elementary for the 2011-2012[1] School Year

Meal Status	School District Percentage[2]	Cardinal Elementary Percentage[3]
Free	57.06	87.56
Full	34.10	7.08
Reduced	8.84	5.35

[1]Department of Education Website not updated for the 2012-2013 school year in this category.
[2]2011-2012 School District Enrollment was 19,376.
[3]2011-2012 Cardinal Elementary Enrollment was 579.

Table 3

School Program Percentage for School District Compared with Cardinal Elementary for the 2011-2012[1] School Year

School Program	School District Percentage[2]	Cardinal Elementary Percentage[3]
Limited English Proficiency	42.83	76.34
Gifted and Talented	9.66	4.66
Special Education	9.26	6.74
Migrant	1.07	2.94
Handicap	1.31	0.69
Foster Child	0.22	0.00

[1]Department of Education Website not updated for the 2012-2013 school year in this category.
[2]2011-2012 School District Enrollment was 19,376.
[3]2011-2012 Cardinal Elementary Enrollment was 579.

Participants

The five teachers in the study were chosen by me in collaboration with the principal at Cardinal Elementary. I requested to study one experienced teacher (>20 years of experience) and one beginning teacher (<5 years of experience) in each of the grade levels, Kindergarten through second. My rationale for requesting these two categories of teachers stems from Berliner's (1986) work on the difference between expert and novice teachers. Further research discusses the difference in teachers with a significant amount of experience versus those with just a few years of experience (Murphy, Delli, & Edwards, 2004; Putnam & Borko, 2000). It is documented that these sets of teachers differ in classroom outlook, willingness to change, and the needs associated with successful change. For the purposes of this study I was curious if there

would be a difference in attitude toward and implementation of CCSS and informational text between these two groups.

After I outlined the participant criteria, I empowered the principal to select the teachers. Originally six teachers were asked to participate and one neglected to respond after several requests were made. There were two teachers chosen from both Kindergarten and first grade as well as one from second grade. This selection criterion of one experienced and one beginning teacher in each grade level was followed for both Kindergarten and first grade. The second grade teacher studied was an experienced teacher. The five teachers were provided with an altered description of the study as well as an informed consent request (see Appendix B). Any teachers uncomfortable with the requirements were able to withdraw from the study, although none of the five did. I also requested to interview the Instructional Facilitator for Cardinal Elementary after I observed her teaching modeled lessons in multiple classrooms to support the teachers' transitions to CCSS.

Bonetti (1998) reported that minor deceptions will not jeopardize studies nor contaminate the results. Rather, he stated there is solid evidence to believe that careful use of deception can enhance control of the study and strengthen validity. The study description given to the participants did not reveal the fact that the study was specifically looking for the use of informational text in their classrooms. Instead, I broadened the scope of the study and communicated to the participants that I was attempting to discover which teaching strategies were being presented in regard to literacy instruction in their classrooms. I also informed them that I was hoping to describe how the newly implemented CCSS may have changed their practices and philosophies regarding the teaching of literacy. I did not want the idea that I was looking for informational text in particular to influence what they were teaching when I went in

to observe, thus skewing the results of my study in a way that would not normally represent the teaching in their classrooms. Further, this was prudent due to my close prior relationship with the school in an attempt to account for the Hawthorne Effect (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006).

Anne (all names are pseudonyms) is a Kindergarten teacher with 23 years of experience in Grade Two and Kindergarten. She is in her 13th year at Cardinal Elementary, all in Kindergarten. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. Following graduation Anne got married and moved from the western United States to the mid-South. She has taught in three different mid-South states in both public and private schools. When asked about her philosophy of education, Anne responded that students "learn by doing and [she believes] they have to be actively engaged" in the learning process. She teaches literacy through songs and stories; "lots and lots of songs! I try to have a song for everything". She uses real objects whenever she has an opportunity. Anne also believes in the power of storytelling with young children.

Becky is a Kindergarten teacher with three years of experience; one year in first grade and two years in Kindergarten. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education. All three years of Becky's experience have been at Cardinal Elementary. In fact, Becky's internship experience for her Bachelor's degree was completed at this school and the administrators hired her as a faculty member upon conclusion of that experience. When asked about her philosophy of education, Becky responded that she believes students learn "by exposure to vocabulary, repeated readings, and through interactions in small groups". Each student in the classroom has a book basket with texts at their determined reading level. They self-select the books for these

baskets and are presented with several opportunities each day to read to themselves as well as their teacher.

Clara is a first grade teacher with 28 years of experience; three years in 2/3 split classroom in Pennsylvania and 25 years in first grade here at Cardinal Elementary, all in the same classroom. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education and took an additional 15 hours beyond but moved before she could finish the Master's. She initially went to college hoping to earn a degree in Home Economics but the program wasn't offered at the school she attended. When it came time to choose a major she took several aptitude tests that indicated education was her strongest area. She changed her major to education and "the moment I made that decision I had such peace that I knew it was probably the right decision. I got into it by accident but I love it". When asked about her philosophy of education, Clara says she believes children "need to have as much exposure to literature as possible and in a fun way". She wants her students "to feel the joy I do when I read". She believes in a hands-on, constructivist approach which is evident in the collaborative environment found in her classroom.

Dana is a first grade teacher with four years of experience; three years in Kindergarten and one year in first grade. She looped from Kindergarten to first grade with the group of students she had this year; out of the 25 students in her class, 16 are in their second year with Dana. She holds a Bachelor's and a Master's degree in Childhood Education. During her first two years of teaching Dana also went back to school and took coursework to earn her teaching endorsement in ESL. All four years of Dana's experience have been at Cardinal Elementary. Dana comes from a family of educators and has many early experiences with ESL families which shaped her as a teacher. She has a social justice perspective and was very purposeful when choosing a place of employment. When asked about her philosophy of education, Dana

says "I firmly believe we have to step back and look at who your students are and what kind of

literacy background they have. You need to know where your students are and where you are

starting." She goes on to explain how students have a natural curiosity and an innate desire to

learn.

> We need to give them adequate support and knowledge prior to learning
> experiences. They definitely have their own concepts, ideas, and experiences
> even if it is just school. I also feel they need time to explore on their own so they
> have time to develop their own ideas and concepts and then seeing what they
> discover and what questions they have…You know, concept before label. Let
> them discover the concept on their own and then as the educator… talk about
> what it is so they already have some background and schema for it before we
> come in and label it.

Emily is a second grade teacher with 20 years of experience in second, third, fourth, and

fifth grade as well as post-secondary. She earned a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education

and a Master's degree in Counseling Psychology with an educational emphasis. Her husband

has served in the military so she frequently moved with her family. Not all of her jobs have been

in public schools since earning her degrees but she is happy to be at Cardinal Elementary where

she has been for 17 years. In 2005, Emily earned her National Board Certification as a middle

childhood generalist. When asked about her philosophy of education she replied "literacy is just

so very important. If we can read the world just opens up to you." She believes that "all kids

can learn but not at the same rate and same way but they do learn. Here we have so many

different kinds of kids and learning styles and cultural differences…I love to have all the

different groups work together." She believes that because of those differences students learn

much more from each other. "Lots of times I will explain something to a child and they don't

get it and another kid can explain and they get it."

Faye is the Instructional Facilitator at Cardinal Elementary. All 25 years of her

experience have been at Cardinal Elementary; 13 years as a Kindergarten teacher and 12 years as

an ESL Specialist, Literacy Specialist, and now Instructional Facilitator. She holds a Bachelor's

and a Master's degree in Early Childhood. In addition to those degrees, Faye has gone back to

school to take additional coursework to add a literacy specialist endorsement to her teaching

license. As the Instructional Facilitator she believes it is her duty to support the teachers in the

change to CCSS and provide them access to as many tools as she can find. She primarily does

this through modeled lessons in the classroom and professional developments using Stephanie

Harvey's Comprehension Tool-Kit and Lindamood-Bell's Visualizing and Verbalizing for

Language Comprehension and Thinking Program.

Teacher demographics are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Teacher Demographic Data

Teacher	Highest Degree Earned	Experience (years)	Grade levels taught	Current Grade level	Gender	Race	Students (*n*)
Anne	Bachelors	23	K, 2nd	K	F	Caucasian	20
Becky	Bachelors	3	K, 1st	K	F	Caucasian	20
Clara	Bachelors+	28	1st, 2/3	1	F	Caucasian	25
Dana	Masters+	4	K, 1st	1	F	Caucasian	25
Emily	Masters	21	2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th, college	2	F	Caucasian	21
Faye	Masters+	25	K, Facilitator	Facilitator	F	Caucasian	N/A

Data Collection and Analysis

As required in case study methodology, multiple sources of data collection were used to

obtain rich, detailed data: document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and observation. Data

were collected over 14 weeks during the months of November through February. The first

source of data was self-reported lesson plans from each of the teacher participants throughout the

collection period. A brief excerpt from these lessons plans can be seen in Figure 1. These

documents were analyzed for codes and themes by the researcher.

Figure 1.

Excerpt from Clara's Self-Reported Lesson Plans

Monday	Tuesday	**Standards Addressed**
Word Work/Spelling Overview: Intro. New Poem "November" Look for high frequency words in the poem. Objective: Students will **know** high frequency words. They will be introduced to the homophones know/no, we will discuss what makes November a "great time of the year". I **can** identify high frequency sight words and locate them in the poem. (RL.1.4)	**Word Work/Spelling** Overview: Rev. Poem. Look for the punctuation used in the poem. Practice reading the poem using the appropriate punctuation. Objective: Students will **know** how to locate the punctuation in the poem. I **can** locate the punctuation in the poem and read it using the appropriate expression. (RL.1.4)	**Word Work** RL.1.4. Identify words and phrases in stories or poems that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses. RF.1.4. Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
Literacy **Overview**: Focus on non-fiction text features. **Objective:** Students will **know** and be able to name the purpose of the use of captions next to a photograph or an illustration and labels on a photo or diagram. I **can** find information in texts by looking at captions located by a photograph or illustration. (RI.1.5) **HOTS**: Describe what is meant by non-fiction features.	**Literacy** **Overview:** Focus on non-fiction text features. **Objective:** Students will **know** how to use a table of contents and learn the purpose is to help organize information in non-fiction texts. I **can** find information by looking at the table of contents in a non-fiction text (RI.1.5) **HOTS**: What difficulties could a reader have if there were no table of contents in a non-fiction text?	**Literacy/Shared Reading** RF.2 Demonstrate understanding of spoken words, syllables, and sounds RI.1.5 Know and use various text features. RI.1.7 Use the illustrations and details in a text to describe its key ideas. RI.1.8 Identify the reasons an author gives to support points on a text.

A second data source were 60 minute semi-structured interviews with each of the

participants (five teachers and one instructional facilitator). These interviews followed an

interview protocol as detailed for IRB (see Appendices C and D for interview questions) and were audio-taped. Following the interviews I transcribed the tapes and the participants were asked to review the transcripts for accuracy. They were then analyzed for codes and themes.

The final source of data included 15 observations (i.e., three 120-180 minute observations in each of the five classrooms during their appointed morning literacy block). The observations were recorded in the form of field notes. Some photographs were taken of artifacts found on the classroom walls, such as anchor charts. These field notes and photographs were then analyzed for codes and themes.

The coding process was done through inductive means. This strategy allowed the important pieces of my data, or my themes, to emerge as analysis proceeded rather than imposing a set of preconceived ideas upon my data set (Patton, 2002). I began the coding process by reading though all sources of data several times and sorting the data into open codes. At this point I also enlisted the expertise of two other individuals, a co-adviser to this study and a doctoral student completing a research internship. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest the use of peer debriefing to guarantee credibility and assure the subsequent findings are grounded within the data. For this study, each peer read through the interview transcripts and noted potential open codes. I then took our lists back to the data from which 31 open codes emerged.

Following this initial open coding I again looked through the data and defined each of the 31 codes, pulling specific pieces of data to illustrate each one. I then grouped these open codes into axial codes. A total of six axial codes emerged. In an attempt to validate my results further, the same co-adviser also grouped the open codes into axial codes. The results, when compared, were similar in grouping and theme. I then defined each axial code using specific data to again support the code.

It was through this process of axial coding that a clear path or progression of understanding emerged. This path is illustrated through the means of a flowchart in the final step of my data analysis. This stage of selective coding during the analysis was borrowed from the grounded theory research design. According to Creswell (2007) grounded theory serves to move a study "beyond description and generate or discover a theory" (p. 63). This study was still a case study but a portion of the analysis became grounded theory when a progression of understanding was discovered in the data. There have been recent studies citing the benefits of combining these two methodologies and how the combination has strengthened the outcome of the research (Fernandez, 2004; Laws & McLeod, 2004). In order for a study to be purely grounded theory, Creswell (2007) suggests the inclusion of 20-30 participants and a zigzag data collection/analysis cycle. My study did not fit these parameters but the inclusion of grounded theory within my analysis clarified the outcome of this case study and served to explain the findings in a more concrete manner.

The final step in the analysis was to employ a third level of coding, or selective coding, and borrow from the grounded theory research design to create a flow chart depicting the understandings stemming from the data. This chart was then used to explain the five teachers in non-high-stakes testing grades in this elementary school in relationship to CCSS and informational text use.

Rigor of the Study

It is important to assess the accuracy of the findings in a case study and there are several strategies that can be used to establish validation and trustworthiness in qualitative studies. Creswell (2007) recommends researchers employ at least two documented procedures to ensure

validation in any given study. I have chosen four strategies to make certain this study was

credible.

The first strategy I employed was triangulation. Triangulation strengthens a study by

using several kinds of data. Studies that use only one method or source of data are more

vulnerable to errors and biases than studies that use multiple methods that provide "cross-data

validity checks" (Patton, 2002, p. 248). My triangulation included three different data collection

sources: document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and observations. By examining all

three sources I was able to gain a more robust perspective on how these Kindergarten, first, and

second grade teachers were using informational text in their classrooms and how they were

adjusting to the literacy paradigm shift embedded in CCSS.

The next strategy I used was to clarify my own bias as the researcher. This ensures that

the reader will understand my position and the biases and assumptions that impact this study. In

qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument (Creswell, 2007). I could not complete this

study without making readers aware of what I brought to the study and without attempting to

bracket my bias (Patton, 2002). My potential bias was clarified in the section entitled

"Credentials and Biases of the Researcher" below.

Thirdly, I employed the strategy of member checking of interview transcripts and

interpretations I made during observations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicate that the use of

member checks is "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314) in a

qualitative study. By using a member check system I more closely ensured that I was truly

telling the story in the words of my participants and it served to curb my biases even further.

Along with member checking, I employed the strategy of peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba,

1985) when analyzing the data and determining both open and axial codes. This further ensured

my analysis was accurate and grounded firmly within the information gathered.

Finally, I attempted to use "rich, thick description" when describing the setting of my

study and the participants in this case study in order to facilitate transferability (Creswell, 2007,

p. 209). Detailed description will aid readers of this study as they decide whether the setting is

similar enough to their own that they can make the same assertions.

Credentials and Biases of the Researcher

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research involves analyzing the researcher as

well as the participants. Each researcher comes to a study with his or her own set of values,

beliefs, and experiences that influence the ways in which a situation is viewed. To ignore this

would be imprudent.

As the researcher, I brought 15 years of passionate literacy teaching experience to this

study. Though 15 years may not seem long, I have accomplished much during that time as

evidenced by the roles in which I served. I taught Kindergarten for seven years, six of those as

the lead teacher. Throughout my tenure as a classroom teacher I was given the opportunity to

pilot a research-based program for a prestigious University in the southeastern United States. It

was in this role that I first noticed the scarcity of informational text in the early elementary

grades.

My next and current role has been one of college instructor in literacy coursework at

another respected University in the mid-Southern United States. Following a year of teaching in

the childhood and elementary education program I was chosen to assume the role of program

coordinator, overseeing the third largest program in the College of Education and leading a

faculty of seventeen experienced tenured, tenure-track, and clinical professors. While daunting

to a junior faculty member, this role has provided me a wealth of experiences and led me to become even more passionate in the area of literacy, specifically informational text literacy.

While working as a faculty member, I've also supervised pre-service teachers during their public school internship. The internship experience is intense and is carried out through multiple grade level placements in one school over the course of a year. A faculty member is assigned to each internship site and builds a close relationship with the administration and faculty of that school. I had the privilege of supervising interns at Cardinal Elementary for two years. I formed a rapport with the teachers there and held weekly professional development sessions on the topic of mentoring. However, my job assignments changed and I have not been an internship supervisor at Cardinal Elementary for the two years prior to this study. I have maintained a relationship with the principals and with several of the teachers but have not been in their classrooms since they implemented CCSS.

I am a combination of my past and present experiences. These have all formed the person, teacher, and researcher I am today. My passion for reading and teaching allowed me to serve many students, teachers, and colleagues throughout the years and I am thankful for each of these experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In both case study and grounded theory research, the data analysis is completed through a series of coding exercises (Creswell, 2007). Following the intense review of the data sets, the researcher begins the coding process, usually in the form of open coding where the data are grouped into categories of information. Open coding is followed by several more rounds of coding where the categories continually become more and more inclusive until the final themes emerge. At this point, the researcher arrives at the conclusions stage of the analysis. This usually takes the form of a narrative story, a visual picture, or in this case both.

The data analysis was completed in five stages. In Stage 1, I transcribed the six hours of audio taped interviews. In Stage 2, I reviewed the data I had collected over the 14 week period. I read through the interview transcriptions several times, reviewed the field notes recorded from the observations, and aligned the lesson plan data with the observational data to produce a research period timeline.

In Stage 3, I enlisted the assistance of two colleagues while reading through the six interview transcripts. During this peer debriefing session, we used an inductive method and began an open coding process, letting codes emerge from the data. My two colleagues supplied me with a list of open codes they had seen on their first read through and I used those lists as I was compiling the final list of open codes for the data. I arrived at 31 open codes. I first coded all the interview data. At this point most of the 31 open codes were present, many of them *in vivo* codes, or code names taken as exact words from the participants (Creswell, 2007). I continued the open coding process with the observational data and then moved on to the lesson plan data. Once the open codes were determined, I defined and illustrated each code with key

pieces of data from the interviews, observations, and lesson plans to support the code and definition.

In Stage 4, I continued the collaboration with one of my colleagues to arrive at six axial codes encompassing the 31 open codes. We each collated the open codes separately and then met to compare the arrived upon axial codes. Upon noting the similarities in our groupings and themes of axial codes, I again defined each one and used pieces of data from the interviews, observations, and lesson plans to illustrate and support each one.

In Stage 5, I employed a grounded theory approach as I analyzed the axial codes and combined categories even further in the selective coding process. The six axial codes became four distinct themes. These four themes emerged as a flowchart used to understand how the Kindergarten through second grade classrooms in this case study had implemented CCSS and incorporated informational text into their classrooms.

Open Coding

Open coding is the process in which data is coded for its major categories of information (Creswell, 2007). To begin the open coding process I took the most information-rich interview from the data set and began the inductive process of coding. I then moved to the interview on the other end of the philosophical spectrum and continued coding. Between these two interviews, most of the open codes emerged. I continued in a similar manner with the other four interviews. I then moved on to the classroom observation data and concluded the open coding process with the lesson plan data.

The 31 open codes that emerged from the data along with their frequencies are listed in Table 5. The codes with the highest frequency in the data were the codes specific to informational text or to CCSS in its broadest sense. In addition, it is noted that the codes with

higher frequencies generally appeared across all data sources where the codes with lower

frequencies emerged from only one or two of the data sources.

For quick access, all of the open codes are identified, defined, and illustrated in Table 6.

To more thoroughly illustrate the open coding definition process I have included the narrative

developed for each of the 31 open codes following Table 6.

Table 5

Open Codes

Open Code	Frequency in Data
Appropriately Respond to Informational Texts	11
Assessments	21
Common Core Impressions	30
Common Core Struggles	18
Curiosity	5
Curriculum Support	5
Depth	10
Encouragement	4
Expectations	9
Exposure	5
Frequency of Use and Availability of Informational Texts	14
Gradual Release	5
Informational Writing	37
Kids Like Informational Text	24
Learning Styles	12
More Time	4
Not Enough Time	5
Organize Information	21
Reading Informational Texts	48
Revelations	1
Schema	7
Student Support	26
Supporting Understanding about Informational Texts	8
Teachers Choosing Books	10
Text Features	72
Types of Informational Texts	10
Understanding by Design	7
Units	11
Utilize Informational Texts	6
Whole Language	4
Zone of Proximal Development	3

Table 6

Open Codes with Definitions and Supporting Data from Interviews, Observations, and Lesson Plans

Open Code	Definition	Supporting Data
Appropriately Respond to Informational Texts	The ways in which students appropriately respond to informational texts	• K students writing about community helpers and using informational texts as support. (Becky) • Using informational texts as research tools as well as student created informational text to build bridge models. (Emily)
Assessments	How teachers feel about the disconnect in teaching practices and current assessments as well as what they are doing in their classrooms to prepare students for a new way of assessing	• Teachers are "developing pre-assessments, post-assessments, and culminating activities" while continually "monitoring and adjusting" (Dana). • First grade team creating performance assessments. (Clara and Dana)
Common Core Impressions	The way teachers *want* to think about CCSS	• "I think students are getting a better education…" (Clara) • "I like it because it gives me a focus of what to do…" (Becky)
Common Core Struggles	Challenges with the shift to CCSS	• "We have to share these books across the grade level. That is tough." (Becky)
Curiosity	Students' natural curiosity and innate desire to learn	• Students are "naturally curious about so many things and many times this [informational texts] is what they are naturally drawn to and what they want to select." (Dana)
Curriculum Support	Amount of support the teachers feel they are receiving during this transition to CCSS whether it is from their administration, each other, or the resources they are using.	• Grade level planning sessions. • "We ended up getting more books…a lot of informational text too" (Becky)

Depth	Identifies the idea that CCSS requires that teachers go deeper into subject matter and ideas rather than skimming the surface as the previous set of standards implied in their implementation.	• "It is not just recall but explaining things like what is happening or what they think will happen." (Becky) • Teachers "are *forced* to go deeper." (emphasis mine…Faye)
Encouragement	Ways in which the students are encouraged to explore informational texts	• "When you get a chance, take a look at this book. It is filled with lots of cool pictures. Do you notice that these are all snakes but they each look different?" (Clara) • School library encourages students to check out books from both fictional and nonfictional genres
Expectations	How CCSS has changed the way schools work and the impact CCSS is having on their classrooms and teaching as far as teacher and student expectations	• Students are "being asked to do things either at a higher level or differently." (Dana) • "The focus is information…getting kids to dig for information in a text." (Clara) • "The grade levels have bumped down but they [students] are rising to the occasion and it is those higher expectations." (Faye)
Exposure	What students should be exposed to in terms of types of texts and literacy strategies	• Students are "exposed to many different types of nonfiction or informational text so they can have exposure to those things". (Dana) • "Children need to have as much exposure to literature as possible and in a fun way so I try to provide more of a hands-on approach." (Clara)
Frequency of Use and Availability of Informational Texts	How often teachers use informational text during instruction and the availability of informational text in the classrooms	• Classroom libraries are between 24% and 45% informational text. • "starting to get closer to that 50/50 mark" and are using "some type of informational text in some aspect of instruction at least four times a week" (Dana) • "probably 80% informational." (Emily)

Gradual Release	The ways teachers support students' understanding of a concept in the classroom	• "I am modeling it, doing some reading aloud, then some partner work and independent work differentiated based on where they are." (Dana) • 2nd grade writing session where students are continually conferenced with, questioned, and referred to resources posted in the room. (Emily)
Informational Writing	The writing students do when they are telling someone what they have learned or if they are conveying facts.	• "We write about something we heard in the book [read-aloud] or that relates to Common Core [units]." (Anne) • "Share with me something you think you know enough about to write about. You could be the expert. You could be the one that writes about it." (Emily during an observation)
Kids Like Informational Text	The discovery that students enjoy reading informational text	• "Students lean a bit more toward informational text because they enjoy reading the facts…they understand that is where the information comes from." (Dana) • "We wanted to encourage them to read informational text but now it has turned out that is what they really like and they are choosing those." (Emily) • Observation of student rushing through the books he has to read so he can choose an informational book from the class library. (Dana)
Learning Styles	Teachers' philosophy of education in relation to how children learn	• "kids learn by doing and they have to be actively engaged…they need some unstructured time to learn and explore." (Anne) • Students "need time to explore on their own so they have time to develop their own ideas and concepts… [Common Core] is about seeing what they know about it and

		letting them investigate." (Dana)
More Time	CCSS gives teachers more time for quality instruction.	• "We can spend longer on certain things instead of just hitting them." (Becky) • We have "more time to spend on those nonfiction pieces and learning how to read them and use them and comprehend them." (Dana)
Not Enough Time	Teachers felt there wasn't enough time to fit everything in they needed to do or teach since the implementation of CCSS.	• "The first year we tried to implement, I think I was still hanging on to the past, trying to fit all that in. The second year was a little bit better because I got rid of some of that stuff we were doing to fill in. Now there is just no time…" (Clara) • "I don't have enough time in the day to fit everything in." (Anne)
Organize Information	Students are given explicit instruction on organization of information and the results of that organization are present in the classrooms.	• "Let's make a web of ideas…things we learned from our visit to Shiloh Museum." (Dana) • "When you are reading to self, I want you to use your post it notes to mark a question, something that is interesting, or something funny." (Clara) • Variety of graphic organizers in 2nd grade (Emily)
Reading Informational Texts	The ways in which teachers use informational texts in the classroom and the modes in which they are read either by the teacher or by the students during instructional time.	• "I tell them this is a story about a real person and this really happened and it is going to give us some information." (Anne) • Read whole group through shared reading. • Many CCSS Informational Text Standards listed in lesson plans.
Revelations	An epiphany	• "Yes, that could be a change…I hadn't really thought about it before till you just said that. They might go a little more heavy on the nonfiction…That is kind of

		interesting (as an aside)." (Emily)
Schema	Teachers' acknowledgement that building the background knowledge of their students is crucial and could arguably be seen as more important since the implementation of CCSS.	• "That is something I do differently now. I build the background before I read a hard story and I do a lot of Common Core things to feed that." (Anne) • "It makes a big difference when they are getting information that is true…it builds their knowledge and schema for other things we are teaching." (Clara)
Student Support	Methods to support student understanding of concepts	• "The material [informational texts] isn't always available in kid-friendly language so I am having to write articles myself. I will take the information I am reading and write it in kid-friendly language and attach a picture to it with a caption." (Clara) • Anchor charts (both teacher and student created) hanging in classrooms.
Supporting Understanding about Informational Texts	Teachers make explicit efforts to support their students' understandings of informational texts.	• Probing for the students' understandings about informational text through the use of questioning. (Clara)
Teachers Choosing Books	The ideas the teachers had in regard to choosing books for instruction as well as how likely they were to choose an informational text on their own when it wasn't a requirement for the lesson.	• "A lot of it has to do with Common Core and whatever our unit is. I really like both of them [*narrative and info text*]. If I can do something on the same topic with both of those it is ideal." (Becky) • "If they are in Common Core [Unit book] and I have it, I will choose that one." (Anne) • "Because I know kids enjoy the nonfiction so much I tend to try to use those for the teaching but when it is read alouds I go to the fiction." (Clara)

Text Features	The mention of specific informational text features and methods used to teach students about these text features	• "we did quite a bit of work at the front teaching how a nonfiction book is set up…about why it is so important." (Clara)
		• "There is something special about some of the words. They are darker or highlighted. What does that mean to me?" (Faye)
		• Various discussions in classrooms regarding text features.
		• Teachers answering students' questions about text features.
Types of Informational Texts	Different formats of informational texts used in the classrooms	• Teachers use various formats of informational text such as trade books, magazines, Scholastic News, dictionaries, etc…
Understanding by Design	The planning that is taking place with the CCSS Units	• "what the curriculum should look like" (Dana)
		• "I think it is hard for teachers to look at assessments first and see what they have to teach…using the whole backwards design model…it is hard to pinpoint." (Faye)
Units	Reference to *Common Core Curriculum Maps in English Language Arts, Grades K-5* published by Jossey-Bass. This text is what is provided at the district level for teachers to use throughout the year as they teach to the CCSS.	• "it is more being given to us…they give us the unit topic." (Emily)
		• "If [Common Core] sticks you will have a lot of teachers who are very well versed in those units." (Faye)
Utilize Informational Texts	Students are using informational texts independently rather than with support from the teacher	• Teachers focus on teaching students to utilize informational texts independently to support their thinking and writing (Faye)
		• When asked questions, students responded with proof from the texts they had been reading. (Faye)
Whole Language	The belief that CCSS is no different than the thematic-unit-whole-language way of teaching	• "I see the Common Core units being a lot like when we did the thematic units in whole language…you teach

	that was prevalent in the past	across the curriculum." (Faye) • "We used to do this in whole language, tying the social studies and science in to the reading program." (Anne)
Zone of Proximal Development	Vygotsky's theory that there is a crucial place of learning for each student where they are challenged just enough to keep moving forward in their learning.	• There is an "optimal place where it's not too difficult but we are challenging them and pushing them beyond where their level of comfort is. I feel like I am constantly in that. I have a greater percentage of time in that optimal place and I am pushing them in a heavily supported, positive way." (Dana) • "When I see the kids that need certain things, I just backtrack." (Anne)

Appropriately Respond to Informational Texts

The code *Appropriately Respond to Informational Texts* was present in the interview and the observation data. This code refers to the ways in which students respond to informational texts. One way could be through writing but this code was a bit broader and included other ways to respond either prior to or in addition to informational writing. A method referred to by both first grade teachers as well as Emily was for students to use informational text as a resource for individual or collaborative research projects. "Almost every student is writing six to ten page books on nonfiction topics or creating collaborative posters or even group projects where there is a product made along with an oral presentation." (Dana)

During one observation in Becky's classroom, I watched a lesson toward the end of a unit of study about community helpers. The students had studied and read about several different occupations in the community that were seen as helpers. The students were asked to respond to these community helper informational texts by writing what community helper they would like

to be when they grow up and listing a few things they knew about that helper. There were several supports present in the classroom to assist the students with their writing including a student and teacher created chart listing various community helpers, a classroom display with pictures and labels of the community helpers studied, and a set of informational texts they had been reading as a class.

Emily was working through a unit of study covering bridges. I observed during the second week of this unit. The students had spent the previous week reading about different bridge designs and researching the reasons behind bridge designs. The teacher gave the following introduction for that week's activities, "Last week we read books about bridges. Then you did your own computer research and made posters. This week we will use that information to plan and build our own bridges."

While in Dana's classroom I observed students responding in writing to informational texts many times. Dana also specifically spoke about responding appropriately to informational texts in her interview. She said that her students "respond by having questions or wanting to know more based on what they read and knowing what resources to go to." In addition, her students "know how to use nonfiction and incorporate it into the classroom and ways to respond appropriately."

Assessments

The code *Assessments* is present in both the interview and the lesson plan data. Currently teachers are required to teach using CCSS, yet the end of the year high-stakes testing assesses the previous set of curriculum standards. In addition, there is much uncertainty about what the new CCSS assessments, or PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) assessments will look like and what content will be present on these exams. The

Assessments code refers to the way teachers feel about the disconnect in the assessments given and the standards being taught. This code also illustrates how students are currently being assessed in this shifting era and the ways teachers are adapting to this uncertainty.

Administrators and teachers are doing their best to prepare students for these new assessments without the knowledge of what will be on the exams. To prepare for what they have been led to believe will be a structure change, teachers are "developing pre-assessments, post-assessments, and culminating activities" while continually "monitoring and adjusting" (Dana).

> We don't know exactly what [PARCC] will look like yet. We have heard so many different things…we have to do our part to get them ready. Even though they aren't testing for us I know there is pressure all the way down to Kindergarten to get them ready. (Clara)

The first grade team has been using performance assessments with their students periodically as found in the lesson plan data. During the data collection period, first grade teachers put students in collaborative groups and allowed them to demonstrate their knowledge at the end of a habitat unit of study in science. The groups were given options for the type of authentic assessment they would like to choose (magazine, illustrative poster, brochure, or diagram) and then were allowed a week to gather their information and complete their task. At the end of the week, students were asked to present and explain their project to the class. This is one example of how the teachers are creating different types of assessments, rather than the traditional paper/pencil test, to assess student learning and prepare students for the types of tasks that may be expected when they begin using the CCSS assessments. "First grade has embraced [Common Core] and they have really pushed and you can see what their kids are doing and what their kids are capable of." (Faye)

Common Core Impressions

The code *Common Core Impressions* represents the mostly positive way teachers think about the shift to CCSS or the way they *want* to think about CCSS. At the time of this study, CCSS was in the second year of implementation in this mid-South state for grades Kindergarten through second. When directly asked about their thoughts regarding CCSS, the interviewed teachers had generally positive statements.

This code revealed itself in the interview data alone. Early in the interviews teachers were asked about their thoughts regarding the shift to CCSS and how that shift had impacted their teaching. They were also asked how it had specifically impacted their literacy teaching. Statements from the participants' interviews such as "I like it because it gives me a focus of what to do…" (Anne), "It made it easier for me to do what I need to do…It provides them [students] a better opportunity to show what they know." (Dana), and "I think [students] are getting a better education because I have to be so focused on what they need to get with Common Core." (Clara) support this code.

It is interesting to note that Anne contradicted herself twice in regard to her thoughts on CCSS. The first contradiction is demonstrated in the following two statements made early in the interview just a couple of minutes apart. She first stated "I don't think I do any different" in regard to the content she is teaching. She then went on to say her literacy instruction "is changing because I am changing what I am teaching." Her second contradiction came a bit later in the interview and was made in a comment regarding the structure of CCSS. She responded that CCSS "is too structured", but then came back two minutes later and said "as far as when to teach what, there isn't a lot of structure".

Common Core Struggles

The code *Common Core Struggles* represents the difficulties the studied teachers are discovering in regard to the shift to bring CCSS into their classrooms. This is a code that was found in the interview data alone. These conflicting feelings did not immediately come out in the interviews when asked about their reactions toward CCSS, rather they emerged throughout the interviews as unsolicited comments.

The struggles mentioned are primarily in response to the lack of resources available to the teachers as they are planning and the lack of resources available to the teachers and students as lessons are progressing in the classroom. Statement such as "We have to share [books] across the grade level. That is tough." (Becky), "We have to work so hard to find materials we need because it isn't all given to us like it was before. It is more of a search." (Clara), and "It is so new and there is nothing out there." (Faye) represent this code.

It is interesting to note that Dana did not discuss her direct struggles with CCSS but she did talk about more of a universal struggle she sees with this paradigm shift:

> If you look at Common Core and say, well they want us to do a few things that look like this, but you continue to teach in a way that reflects what you have always done or teach in the way you did before being exposed to UbD or backwards design then I don't think what the students do or what is expected of them would change much.

Faye echoed this sentiment in her interview when she said,

> I think teachers may think they are going deeper, but is our thinking going deeper? Are we asking those higher level questions? Are we expecting more rigor? While teachers feel like that is what they are doing, because I am teaching the Common Core so that is what I am doing…I must be doing that; we have to keep pushing in this area.

Curiosity

The code *Curiosity* was identified in the interview data from Dana but also ties to several comments made by other teachers when referencing children's love for informational texts. This code of Curiosity though speaks to a young child's "innate desire to learn and to want to know". (Dana) Several teachers discuss that informational texts answer the questions kids have about our world. Again, Dana mentions that students are "naturally curious about so many things and many times [informational text] is what they are naturally drawn to and what they want to select." This also supports statements in the review of literature regarding students' desire to choose informational text based on their natural curiosity (Duke et al., 2003; Norton, 2011).

Curriculum Support

Curriculum Support is a code that emerged from the interview and the observation data. This code refers to the amount of support the teachers feel they are receiving during this transition to CCSS whether it is from their administration, each other, or the resources they are using. This code revealed that the teachers are planning the curriculum together more frequently in grade level teams. Emily told me during one observation that "second grade has begun writing lesson plans together rather than just 'simply planning' (air quotes) together." She indicated that she likes this change but things are a "bit different structure-wise and it has taken some getting used to."

Other teachers note that they are being supported through increased resources for teaching the Units (another code). "We ended up getting more books…a lot of informational text too" (Becky). "It's really helpful to plan together." (Emily).

Depth

       Depth was another code related to the impressions of CCSS that emerged strictly from the interview data. I chose to set this code apart because it was an area that was mentioned explicitly by all but two study participants. This code identifies the idea that CCSS requires teachers go deeper into subject matter and ideas rather than skimming the surface as the previous set of curriculum standards implied in their implementation.

       Throughout the interviews, participants repeatedly spoke of the standards requiring them to teach deeper, the students to understand deeper, and what that entailed from them in preparation. Becky mentioned, "It is not just recall but explaining things like what is happening or what they think will happen." Dana said, "We take a really in-depth look at what students should know and understand." Clara pointed out, "It is going deeper and there is so much that needs to be done to make it deep…the shift has made us think deeper into what kids need before they move onto second grade." Finally Faye stated that teachers "are *forced* to go deeper." (emphasis mine).

Encouragement

       The code *Encouragement* was discovered in a statement made by Clara during an observation. The students were ending a lesson on informational texts and the difference between illustrations and photographs. There were several science informational texts displayed in the tray of a white board. Before dismissing the students for a restroom break the teacher pointed to the books on display. "When you get a chance, take a look at this book. It is filled with lots of cool pictures. Do you notice that these are all snakes but they each look different?" The teacher in this observation encouraged the students to explore informational texts in their own time.

This was the only incident of direct encouragement noted in the observations. However, several teachers noted in their interviews that they did not feel the need to encourage students to use informational texts because the students chose this genre of text on their own. In fact Dana spoke about her hesitance to encourage one genre of text over another. "I don't mandate that you have to have this many of this type of book or that book right now. I just want them to grow and develop a love for reading and a love for literature."

Another area of encouragement comes from the media specialist at this school. She is a new faculty member this year and has changed some of the book check-out policies for the students. Both Clara and Emily mentioned the fact that this media specialist allows the students to "choose a fiction and a nonfiction book which is a big shift because in the past they weren't allowed to pick anything that was in the nonfiction section." It appears that encouragement for reading all genres, including a new focus on nonfiction, comes not only from the classroom teacher but other school personnel as well.

Expectations

Expectations is a code that also emerged from interview data when participants were discussing how CCSS has changed the way schools work and the impact these standards are having on their classrooms and teaching. The expectations are "different" and the participants listed several examples of this in their interviews. Some of the differences are evident in the higher level thinking requirement with CCSS, the focus on information, the requirement that students are exposed to half fiction and half nonfiction, and the increased rigor across all grade levels.

Statements representing this code include (a) Students are "being asked to do things either at a higher level or differently." (Dana), (b) "The focus is information…getting kids to dig

for information in a text." (Clara), and (c) "The grade levels have bumped down but [students] are rising to the occasion and it is those higher expectations." (Faye)

This code was present in the interview data from all participants minus the Kindergarten teachers. It is unclear as to whether or not they feel the expectations are changing or if this was not an area they were concerned with at the time of the interviews.

Exposure

The code *Exposure* comes from interview data when teachers are discussing their ideas on what students should be exposed to in terms of types of texts and literacy strategies. Dana explained that students are "exposed to many different types of nonfiction or informational text so they can have exposure to those things. Clara discussed, "Children need to have as much exposure to literature as possible and in a fun way so I try to provide more of a hands-on approach."

Frequency of Use and Availability of Informational Texts

The code *Frequency of Use and Availability of Informational Texts* presented itself in both the interview and the observation data. In the interviews, teachers were asked how often they chose informational text as their instructional material and where that type of text usually fit within their instruction. During the initial observation, I noted the make-up of each classroom library that was available for students to use during independent reading time as well as other books that may be available for student choice. The frequencies of informational text in classroom libraries at the time of the initial observation are illustrated in Table 7.

When asked how frequently they chose informational text during instruction, grades Kindergarten and first were more focused on "when it fits" (Becky). Dana did note that they are

"starting to get closer to that 50/50 mark" and are using "some type of informational text in some aspect of instruction at least four times a week". However, in second grade Emily indicated her instruction was "probably 80% informational." It is interesting to note that even though Emily spoke of the instruction being 80% informational, I did not observe any informational text use while she was teaching and there was very little data in her lesson plans to support this statement.

Table 7

Frequencies of Text Genres in Classroom Libraries at the Time of Initial Observation

Teacher	Percentage of Narrative Text (*n*)	Percentage of Informational Text (*n*)
Becky	.55 (*32*)	.45 (*26*)
Anne	.66 (*35*)	.34 (*18*)
Dana	.75 (*16*)	.25 (*6*)
Clara	.76 (*1458*)	.24 (*459*)
Emily	.65 (*699*)	.35 (*381*)

Gradual Release

The code *Gradual Release* was found in both the interview and the observation data. This code refers to the way teachers support students' understanding of a concept in the classroom. They first talk about the concept and then they model it for the students. They then share in the responsibility of the learning process with the students as they turn more and more of the learning over to the students until eventually students carry out the task independently.

Dana discussed this process of teaching in her interview, "We are doing kind of a gradual release where I am modeling it, doing some reading aloud, then some partner work and

independent work differentiated based on where they are." This was evident in her classroom during an observation. She and her students were working through an interactive writing activity using the students' knowledge about tornados. "Let's write a nonfiction piece about tornados…There was a tornado. I need to know details…" The students then engaged in the writing of the informational piece by providing details to the teacher as she wrote. Following this interactive writing with a focus on adding details to nonfiction writing, she dismissed them to their seats to begin working on their own informational writing.

Another example of this code was found in the observation data from Emily. Her class was working on a unit of study over the topic of freedom. This unit included both informational and narrative texts on the subject of slavery, civil rights, and freedoms in general. The class had read *Henry's Freedom Box* the day before and the teacher was guiding them through a discussion over the book. "I want you to pretend that you were in Henry's place. Yesterday you were very shocked that they just gave Henry away." She shows the picture in the book where this happened. As the students talk, the teacher continues to support their developing understanding of this topic by asking questions and showing illustrations. Following this conversation the teacher releases students to begin writing about this topic but places a graphic organizer from the previous day under the document camera to provide additional support. She also walks around the classroom and frequently addresses miscommunications and misunderstandings. She points out additional resources in the room to guide the students to a more complete understanding including a map with passages on the Underground Railroad marked.

Informational Writing

One specific way that students respond to informational texts is through *Informational Writing*. This code refers to the writing students do when they are telling someone what they

have learned or if they are conveying facts. While this code was present in all three data sources it was clear throughout the observation and lesson plan data that the bulk of the writing done by Kindergarten through second grade students is informational in nature. There are only a few instances where students were observed to write opinion or narrative pieces and when this was observed it happened more frequently in the Kindergarten classrooms.

Several teachers mentioned informational writing in their interviews and this type of writing was observed either in the classroom or found in the lesson plan data from the three teachers in grades 1 and 2. Becky said, "[Students] have a focus for their writing instead of just freely writing…I think I get more." Dana explained, "[Students] know how to read informational text and how to write an informational piece based on what they are reading." Emily spoke to students during an observation and instructed them to "Share with me something you think you know enough about to write about. You could be the expert. You could be the one that writes about it."

This type of writing was also found heavily in the first grade lesson plans. The first grade team of teachers plan together so the data was found identically in both the experienced and the beginning teachers' plans. Throughout the research period, students in first grade were writing informational pieces covering various topics such as inventors or animals. They were also being asked essential questions such as "Why do authors go through the writing process? What would happen if they didn't?" First grade students were introduced to selecting a topic that was the "right fit" and then writing a table of contents on their chosen topic. An example of informational writing was discovered in the second grade lesson plans as well. "The students will choose something they know a lot about and write the steps needed to do it." The CCSS was referenced as well and converted into an I-can statement. "I can write an

informative/explanatory text in which I introduce a topic, use fact and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement. CC.2.W.2"

Kids Like Informational Texts

The code *Kids Like Informational Texts* emerged from the interview and observation data. This code was present in data across all study participants and student interest in informational texts was referenced in every participant's interview. It is interesting to note that the only teacher in the study who made a negative comment about students and their interest in informational text was Anne. She said, "[Students] really like fiction and fantasy books a lot. The nonfiction they aren't that interested in." The other five teachers interviewed repeatedly referenced how the CCSS focus on nonfiction has been "an easy switch" (Faye). Becky shared, "It was all information and they were really into it and asked lots of questions." While Dana explained, "Students lean a bit more toward informational text because they enjoy reading the facts…they understand that is where the information comes from." Clara stated, "I know kids enjoy the nonfiction so much!" Emily indicated, "We wanted to encourage them to read informational text but now it has turned out that is what they really like and they are choosing those." Faye continued to support their statements by explaining "Kids like facts. They want to learn more about that because it is real life. That is something they can touch. It is something we have facts about. So I think it has been an easy switch."

The evidence that *Kids Like Informational Text* was found throughout the observation data as well. In Becky's, Dana's, and Clara's classrooms I witnessed students self-selecting informational texts for independent reading. In Dana's classroom I observed a student's mother come into the classroom to read with her son. He hurried to read all the books in his browsing basket so he could read a book about floods from the classroom library. It was a nonfiction text

and he was reading and teaching his mom about the topic as he read. He would ask her questions as he read and then look through the book for answers. He was more engaged in this book than in any of the others he had read from his browsing basket with his mother previously. Likewise, in Clara's classroom I sat beside a student as he was reading independently. He had chosen a nonfiction text about lizards and wanted to show me what he was reading. He shared with me that he is "very interested in nonfiction because I like to learn new things." He was actively using the labels, index, and bolded words as he read.

Learning Styles

The code *Learning Styles* emerged from the teacher interview data primarily when they were asked about their own philosophy of education in relation to how children learn.

Three of the five teachers spoke at length about their ideas regarding the development of children and how that translated into the structure of their classroom. Anne in particular was worried about the disconnect in what we know about child development and what they are being asked to do with the new CCSS. She said "kids learn by doing and they have to be actively engaged…they need some unstructured time to learn and explore." Dana echoed her sentiments in regard to the need for exploration yet did not feel as if CCSS were putting this need in jeopardy. She said students "need time to explore on their own so they have time to develop their own ideas and concepts… [CCSS] is about seeing what they know about it and letting them investigate." Emily shared her thoughts about students' learning styles in the following statement, "all kids can learn but not at the same rate and the same way…there are so many different kinds of kids and learning styles and cultural differences [here]. They learn from each other."

More Time

The code *More Time* emerged from the interview data in regard to the thoughts the participants held about CCSS. This code was unique to the beginning teachers in the study and was not noted in the thinking of the experienced teachers; the opposite was discovered in the thinking of the experienced teachers (see code Not Enough Time). Faye briefly spoke about this phenomenon of time when she said "Teachers appreciate the fact that there aren't as many standards that have to be covered."

Both the beginning Kindergarten and first grade teachers noted that they believed they had more time to spend on ideas and content related teaching. The following statements continue to support this code: (a) "We can spend longer on certain things instead of just hitting them." (Becky), and (b) We have "more time to spend on those nonfiction pieces and learning how to read them and use them and comprehend them." (Dana).

Not Enough Time

In contrast with the code *More Time*, the experienced teachers in the study mentioned the idea that they felt there wasn't enough time to fit everything in they needed to do or teach since the implementation of CCSS. Anne mentioned, "I don't have enough time in the day to fit everything in." Likewise Clara said there is "no time for anything except what Common Core asks us to teach". She offered a commentary that allowed me to see into the thinking of the more experienced teachers, the teachers who were used to teaching during the era of the previous standards. She explained the transition to CCSS in this way: "The first year we tried to implement, I think I was still hanging on to the past, trying to fit all that in. The second year was a little bit better because I got rid of some of that stuff we were doing to fill in. Now there is just no time…"

Organize Information

        The code *Organize Information* was found across all three data sources and was noticed in five of the six teachers' data. The only teacher not represented within this code was Anne. Techniques for organizing information were something students were given explicit instruction on and the results of this organization were often present on classroom walls in the form of teacher and student created anchor charts. Often these charts had pictures and labels on them as was the case in Becky's classroom with a life-cycle of the pumpkin chart created by the students after reading informational texts about this topic.

        Strategies mentioned in the first grade classrooms involved organizing thinking for writing and organizing thoughts for sharing. In Dana's classroom the whole group was participating in an interactive writing activity recounting a recent field trip to a history museum. "Let's make a web of ideas…things we learned from our visit to Shiloh Museum." After they had created the web together, students were sent to their individual seats to begin writing their own informational pieces. As the students are working, the teacher stops them to draw the class's attention to a particularly strong organizational technique observed on one student's paper. "I want you to look here. X planned his writing in his picture. He drew three places and numbered them so he would remember the order when writing." Clara was observed sharing organizational strategies when her students were reading. "When you are reading to self, I want you to use your post-it notes to mark a question, something that is interesting, or something funny."

        Strategies for organizing information were something Emily spent a great deal of time on as referenced in her lesson plans. Students were given various graphic organizers for writing and after several were taught, they were given the opportunity to choose their own based on their

individual thinking and needs. Near the end of the research period, Emily taught a lesson where students were given copies of information found within two different informational texts. They were to do a jigsaw read and report back to the class about their assigned section. They were then to create an anchor chart web with what the Underground Railroad was. The CCSS referenced was "CC.2.W.7. I can actively participate in shared research."

Faye was observed teaching a modeled lesson using a close-read technique in Emily's classroom. Faye had created a text compiling information from multiple informational texts previously read with this second grade class on the topic of cacti. Prior to reading she passed out sticky notes for students to use as they were reading. They were told to look for the following information: What did I wonder, what did I learn, and WOW. The students were also asked to determine which previous resource was used for specific pieces of information. They would note the reference in the margin so they could go back later to find more details. "This is something I need to investigate or research. Use a crayon and underline the part you already knew and tell me what resource I got that from. Where did you learn that?"

Reading Informational Texts

Reading Informational Texts is a code that was present in all three data sources: interview, observation, and lesson plans. This code refers to the ways in which teachers use informational texts in the classroom and the modes in which they are read either by the teacher or by the students during instructional time.

This code emerged from the interview data primarily when the teachers were speaking about the ways in which they define informational texts to the students. Becky explained, "I told them what the book was going to be about and that this wasn't just a story; it was real and

informational and it was going to teach us something." Anne mentioned, "I tell them this is a story about a real person and this really happened and it is going to give us some information."

During the observations, it was noted that a variety of methods were used to read informational text with students. In Kindergarten most reading, including informational texts, were read using a shared reading technique either with a big book or under the document camera so all students could readily see the material. The teachers used pointers or their fingers to track the print as they read and there was a heavy focus on print concepts such as title and cover page. Student connections to the text were encouraged as the books are read and at times there was additional background information built using a movie or other informational source from the internet. In first grade, students also participated in shared reading of informational texts. Informational reading was incorporated primarily into the science and social studies content areas where students were taught that facts come from informational texts. Informational texts were also used frequently during the guided reading groups. In second grade, informational texts were also read aloud although the practices of shared reading are not strongly present. Students were encouraged to make connections but they are at a more complex level like text-to-world and text-to-text.

The code *Reading Informational Texts* was also noted in the lesson plans at all grade levels. As observed, most of the reading informational text standards in CCSS for Kindergarten were demonstrated through shared reading. The three most commonly found standards for this grade level were RI.K.1: I can ask and answer questions about a story, RI.K.4: I can find words I do not know and ask questions about the words I do not know, and RI.K.7: I can match pictures to words or sentences. In first grade lesson plans, students were identifying the main topic and retelling key details in informational texts. They were also describing the connection between

two individuals, events, ideas, or pieces of information in a text (RI.1.3). There was a strong focus on using pictures to support understanding and on asking questions. At the end of the research period, the students were beginning to identify the reasons an author gives to support points in a text (RI.1.8). In second grade lesson plans, several informational texts were identified as read aloud material. The CCSS identified in these plans were RI.2.1: I can ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text and RI.2.3: I can describe the connection between a series of historical events in a text.

Revelation

The code *Revelation* emerged from the interview data with Emily. *Revelation* was evident more from the tone of the conversation and the comment made by this teacher, almost an epiphany. We were discussing the changes that CCSS has brought to the second grade and at first she didn't believe it had changed things much. We continued discussing and got more into the topic of the increased use of informational texts in classrooms. I asked her if this increased use of informational texts could be attributed to CCSS. "Yes, that could be a change…I hadn't really thought about it before till you just said that." We continued to discuss students choosing informational texts on their own and how she was noticing that they liked and may even prefer these types of texts over fiction. "They might go a little more heavy on the nonfiction…That is kind of interesting (as an aside)."

Schema

The code *Schema* refers to the teachers' acknowledgement that building the background knowledge of their students is crucial and could arguably be seen as more important since the implementation of CCSS.

When discussing how the implementation of CCSS has changed their teaching practices in the interviews, both Anne and Clara mentioned the importance of building schema with their students. Anne stated, "That is something I do differently now. I build the background before I read a hard story and I do a lot of Common Core things to feed that." Clara explained, "It makes a big difference when they are getting information that is true…it builds their knowledge and schema for other things we are teaching."

This code was also noticed in the observation data. Anne was reading a fictional Jan Brett story that involved many animals and vocabulary words that were unfamiliar to the students. Prior to reading, she introduced the animals to the children using photographs and a sound clip found on Wikipedia so the students could hear how the animal sounded. This code was also noted in Dana's room in a similar way. The students were beginning a unit of study involving Baum's story *The Wizard of Oz*. Prior to the beginning of each chapter, the teacher would discuss the difficult vocabulary words and use photographs to show the students what those words meant. It is interesting to note that even though both of these books were illustrated and the concepts being introduced were illustrated within the fictional texts, the teachers chose pictures of real objects to build the schema for these students.

Student Support

The *Student Support* code emerged from both the interview and the observation data. This code was found when teachers were discussing methods to support student understanding of

concepts in the interviews or when a particular support was heard or seen during an observation. In observation data this was evidenced in the teaching and also in the physical environment of the classroom. This code was often noted in terms of informational text but also fit the broader context of any type of teaching.

There were many supports noted in the physical environment of the classroom including the language rich classroom labels in both Kindergarten classrooms and the numerous anchor charts across all three grade levels. Students' support of informational texts using student-created charts was specifically noted in Clara's room.

The teachers in the study discussed and demonstrated various ways they chose to support students' understanding throughout the interviews.

> The [informational text] isn't always available in kid-friendly language so I am having to write articles myself. I will take the information I am reading and write it in kid-friendly language and attach a picture to it with a caption. (Clara)

In addition to the physical environment of the classroom and the teachers' comments in the interviews, this code was also found in the observation data recorded throughout the lessons. Many times when teachers were discussing an unfamiliar topic they would direct the students' attention to a book or an informational poster to provide additional support. Other times the teacher would refer to a previous discussion they had and relate it to something the students were about to create. "Today we had a chance to look at some nonfiction books and how captions give us information. This author had to know something about owls to write this book. Sometimes when I start to write and I have to pick my topic it helps to make a list of things I know about" (Clara).

This code of *Student Support* was also evident in a lesson taught by Faye that I observed while in Emily's classroom. She had created an informational text on the topic of cacti which

she had previously discussed with this group of students. Faye came in that particular day to model a lesson on note taking and close-reads of informational texts. She stopped periodically in the reading with the students to model her own thinking. "There are a couple of things in there that I noticed." She goes back to the passage to circle and underline. She points out the main idea from the first paragraph and thinks aloud, "those are two important things, don't you think? Or at least they are to me." She also draws a representation of a cactus as she is reading so she can understand how they store water.

Supporting Understanding about Informational Texts

The code *Supporting Understanding about Informational Texts* emerged from the classroom observation data in both the first grade classrooms. It was noted that both these teachers made explicit efforts to support their students' understandings of this text genre. They questioned their students about their understanding, "Is this fiction or nonfiction?" (Dana). Clara asked the same question but then followed the question up with additional inquiries in order to truly gauge the students' level of understanding. "Do you know what kinds of things are in these books? Fiction or nonfiction?" A student responded, "nonfiction". The teacher then asked, "What is the difference between fiction and nonfiction? We have talked about fiction and nonfiction a lot. I want to know the difference between these types of writings." Various students responded and the teacher then summarized, "Did you hear that? Fiction is not real but nonfiction is real. Nonfiction has interesting features and they give us information to learn."

Clara followed this line of questioning in other observations as well; not only asking an initial question but really probing for the students' understandings. When discussing realistic fiction, this teacher wanted her students to understand the difference in this genre and informational text. "We have to be careful not to think this is nonfiction. What is nonfiction?"

Multiple students replied, "real and true". The teacher then continued, "We have to understand these are made up people even though the story sounds real."

Teachers Choosing Books

The code *Teachers Choosing Books* speaks to the ideas the teachers in the study had in regard to choosing books for instruction as well as how likely they were to choose an informational text on their own when it wasn't a requirement for the lesson. The data for this code came from the teacher interviews although the observations may support much of what was discovered in conversations. Becky explained, "A lot of it has to do with Common Core and whatever our unit is. I really like both of them (*narrative and info text*). If I can do something on the same topic with both of those it is ideal." Clara said, "Because I know kids enjoy the nonfiction so much I tend to try to use those for the teaching but when it is read alouds I go to the fiction." (Clara)

Text Features

The code *Text Features* is present across all three data sources and is represented most often in the first grade data sources. This code refers to the mention of specific informational text features and methods used to teach students about these text features.

In the interviews the teachers were all asked which text features are most important to teach with the students in their grade level. Becky listed the table of contents, labels, captions, and bolded words. Dana said that captions, bolded words, index, glossary, tables, graphs, and photographs were all a focus in first grade. Clara echoed these features and said "we did quite a bit of work at the front teaching how a nonfiction book is set up…about why it is so important." Emily continued with the list and indicated that captions, pictures, and headings are very

important. She was excited to point out that the time spent on text features has paid off and that students are beginning to notice these features without prompting. Faye did mention that teaching about these informational text features has been one of the most difficult tasks to come from CCSS but she is seeing a lot of "anchor charts in peoples' classrooms".

The informational text features mentioned in the interviews were also seen as a focus in many of the classrooms during observations or throughout the lesson plans. Text features were not represented in the Kindergarten lesson plans but I did observe an informal discussion about the glossary and bolded words in Becky's classroom. The discussion was prompted by a student question, "X was wondering what these were. This is a glossary. It tells us what all the dark words in the story mean." At that point she did go back into the informational text about teachers and pointed to the bolded word "subjects". She then went back to the glossary and found this word. "It means art, math, and reading. When you are older you will go to different classrooms for different subjects."

Focus on informational text features was heavily represented in the first grade lesson plans for both the beginning and experienced teachers. These text feature discussions were not observed in Dana's classroom but evidence from the lessons were present on the walls in the form of various anchor charts. I did observe multiple lessons regarding informational text and the different features in Clara's classroom. At one point the teacher and students were creating a T-chart on nonfiction text features. One side was titled "feature" with the other side titled "purpose". She introduced the activity in the following way: "I have a T-chart here. We are going to start keeping track of features we find in nonfiction texts. One of the features we looked at today was a caption…a caption that goes with a photograph or an illustration. These are different but both have captions. What is the purpose of a caption?" A student answered "to

know more". Clara wrote this as the purpose and responded "Oh! I love it!" She continued this process with photographs, illustrations, and labels. The chart remained on the easel at the end of the discussion with the premise that the class would continue to add to this list. There were also several lessons in the first grade lesson plans that referenced informational text features. The students were working on creating individual text feature booklets to use as a reference guide when they write nonfiction texts. Several of the higher order thinking essentials questions asked were: "Describe what is meant by nonfiction features", "What difficulties could a reader have if there were no table of contents in a nonfiction text?", "Explain why an author would use a map in a text.", "How is a map similar to a chart in nonfiction texts?", "What would you say is the most important part to label on the illustration you drew?" among others.

While I did not find an emphasis on informational text features in Emily's lesson plans, I did observe parts of lessons that referenced these features. When I observed the discussions referencing text features it appeared that the students were already familiar with them. After reading a book about slavery a student wonders if the man "ever gets free. Does it tell us in the back?" The teacher replied with "There is an author's note here so let me read this and see what it tells us about this story." I also observed Faye teach a lesson over informational texts in this classroom. While teaching she said, "There is something special about some of the words. They are darker or highlighted. What does that mean to me?" The students responded that they are "special words, important words."

Types of Informational Texts

The code *Types of Informational Texts* is present in some form throughout the interview, observation, and lesson plan data for the first and second grade teachers as well as Faye. This

code did not emerge from the Kindergarten teacher data. *Types of Informational Texts* refer to

the mention of different formats of informational texts used in the classrooms.

Both first grade teachers and Faye mentioned online references and magazines written for

students such as National Geographic for Kids or Ranger Rick. I had the opportunity to observe

students using these magazines in Clara's classrooms as they were exploring the difference in

photographs and illustrations. After passing out the magazines the teacher told the students, "I

want you to look at these just for a few minutes. You are getting to look at some really cool

things." Emily mentioned the text book as one source of information for the content areas of

science and social studies. She also used Scholastic News with her students. During one lesson

the students were exploring different tools that would assist them with their writing. The teacher

pointed out "A dictionary can help us spell a word or tell us what it means. A thesaurus helps us

figure out synonyms for words to make our writing more powerful."

Understanding by Design

The code *Understanding by Design* (UbD) was used by Dana when she discussed the

planning that is taking place with the CCSS units. Wiggins and McTighe's (2005) model of

backwards design is a focus for students in the childhood and elementary education program at

the nearby university. Students graduating from this program should be well versed in this

curriculum design model. Dana is a recent graduate of this program and related the planning she

is able to do since the implementation of CCSS to "what the curriculum should look like",

referring to the model of UbD. She further described this idea saying, "I knew about UbD and

the correct way to plan but it was a challenge coming in to a school and working in a grade level

where everyone didn't have the same kind of background and was unfamiliar with UbD or

looking at things as a unit of study instead of looking at it as this week we do this and next week

we do this…" She said, "If you REALLY look at Common Core…if you look at it with that background knowledge in UbD and how to plan a unit and how to plan instruction, you would HAVE TO…your students would HAVE TO be doing more."

This code was also present in the interview data from Faye when she discussed the challenges present during this paradigm shift. "I think it is hard for teachers to look at assessments first and see what they have to teach…using the whole backwards design model…it is hard to pinpoint."

Units

The code *Units* emerged from the interview data. The units the participants reference throughout the interviews come from the book *Common Core Curriculum Maps in English Language Arts, Grades K-5* published by Jossey-Bass (2012). This text is what is provided at the district level for teachers to use throughout the year as they teach to CCSS. The text is composed of six, 6-week units for each grade level Kindergarten through fifth and alternates between the social studies and science content areas with literacy integrated throughout. The resources and book sets the participants reference in the interviews as being a challenge to share are the books from the unit lists in this text. The district where the study school is located required all teachers to teach these units and it was noticed throughout the study that when teachers would mention CCSS they were more often talking of these units. In fact, when interviewing Anne about the changes associated with CCSS she immediately got up to retrieve her copy of this text before answering any of the questions.

Statements from the interviews such as "We get familiar with the unit and what needs to be done." (Becky), "Our unit dictates what content areas get the focus right now. [Social studies] is automatically in there because of Common Core and the unit." (Becky), and "If

[Common Core] sticks you will have a lot of teachers who are very well versed in those units."
(Faye) further support this code.

Utilize Informational Texts

The code *Utilize Informational Texts* was present in the observation and interview data
for both first grade teachers. Faye also mentioned ways in which students are being taught to
utilize informational texts. In this code students are using these resources independently rather
than with support from the teacher. The teacher support came at an earlier time.

Dana said that students were using informational text as they read and they were to "go
back and look for that information in the text" to support their statements. Clara mentioned the
students' ability to utilize their informational resources. "We put an anchor chart up so they can
refer to it when they read." She also wrote the standard on the white board in kid friendly terms.
During one observation a student pointed to the standard "RI.1.5: I can find information in
nonfiction books by looking at the captions." She then showed her teacher a picture in a Ranger
Rick magazine and demonstrated her ability to glean the new information from the caption. Her
excitement at noticing this independently was evident.

Faye also mentioned the focus on teaching students to utilize informational texts
independently to support their thinking and writing. When describing a modeled lesson she did
in a second grade classroom she said she asked for students to give her proof that Abraham
Lincoln had attended school. The students responded with evidence from the texts they had been
reading. "We know he was educated because in the book it talked about how he went to school
and even when he was young he walked two miles. There is proof that he went to school."

Whole Language

Another code that emerged from the interview data of the experienced teachers alone was the code *Whole Language*. When asked about their impressions of CCSS the teachers with 20+ years of experience related it back to the idea of the thematic-unit-whole-language way of teaching that was prevalent in the past. Anne said, "We used to do this in whole language, tying the social studies and science in to the reading program." Clara concurred with "We used to do thematic units and that is a lot of what we are doing now…it just ties it all together." Faye continued with "I see the Common Core units being a lot like when we did the thematic units in whole language…you teach across the curriculum."

Zone of Proximal Development

The code *Zone of Proximal Development* emerged from the interview data with both Anne and Dana. This code refers to Vygotsky's theory that there is a crucial place of learning for each student where they are challenged just enough to keep moving forward in their learning. In fact, Dana used nearly this definition in her interview when talking about the benefits of CCSS and how it has allowed her to have more time. There is an "optimal place where it's not too difficult but we are challenging them and pushing them beyond where their level of comfort is. I feel like I am constantly in that. I have a greater percentage of time in that optimal place and I am pushing them in a heavily supported, positive way." Anne used this idea of *Zone of Proximal Development* to discuss how she adjusts her instruction. "When I see the kids that need certain things, I just backtrack."

Axial Coding

Axial coding is the process of refining open codes into more inclusive themes that move the understanding closer toward the core phenomenon of the study (Creswell, 2007). In Stage 4 of the data analysis process, I condensed the 31 open codes into six axial codes. The six codes for this case study became (a) *How We Want to Think about Common Core*, (b) *Realities of Common Core*, (c) *Shifting Literacy Paradigm*, (d) *Support for Teachers and Students*, (e) *Kids and Informational Text*, and (f) *Teaching Using Informational Texts*. Table 8 lists the six axial codes with the division of the 31 open codes that fed into them.

Table 8

Axial Codes and the Open Codes within them

Axial Code	Open Codes
How We Want to Think about Common Core	• Common Core Impressions • Whole Language
Realities of Common Core	• Assessments • Common Core Struggles • Depth • Expectations • More Time • Not Enough Time • Understanding by Design • Units
Shifting Literacy Paradigm	• Exposure • Frequency of Use and Availability of Informational Texts • Learning Styles • Teachers Choosing Books • Types of Informational Texts
Support for Teachers and Students	• Curriculum Support • Encouragement • Gradual Release • Schema • Student Support • Supporting Understanding about Informational Texts • Zone of Proximal Development
Kids and Informational Texts	• Curiosity • Kids Like Informational Texts
Teaching Using Informational Texts	• Appropriately Respond to Informational Texts • Informational Writing • Organize Information • Reading Informational Texts • Text Features • Utilize Informational Texts

During this axial coding process it was determined that one of the open codes did not have enough support to be included within the themes. The open code *Revelation* was found only in the interview data from Emily. It was recorded based on one statement made in the interview and was not supported by any other data source or teacher. It was labeled as a Null code at this point in the analysis.

How We Want to Think about Common Core

How We Want to Think about Common Core is a code that encompasses two of the open codes from the interview data with the five teachers and one instructional facilitator. The open codes feeding into this axial code are (a) *Common Core Impressions* and (b) *Whole Language*. This code is optimistic in tone and was detected early on in the interviews. Within it are the teachers' means of explaining their initial, generally positive thoughts about CCSS along with their rationalizations that CCSS really isn't any different than what they used to do (for the experienced teachers). Everyone except Becky is represented within this code. However, it is interesting to note that the references to CCSS not differing from what they used to do came only from three of the four teachers with 20+ years of experience; they liken it to the whole language, thematic unit way of teaching.

Statements from the interviews supporting this axial code were: (a) "…this is what good teaching is." (Dana), (b) "I think [students] are getting a better education because I have to be so focused on what they need to get with Common Core." (Clara), (c) "We used to do thematic units in whole language and that is a lot of what we are doing now…it just all ties together." (Emily), (d) "It isn't any different than what we used to teach (*whole language)*…it is just a bit more condensed and more thorough." (Anne), and (e) "It goes back to the whole language thematic approach and you teach across the curriculum." (Faye).

This positive and reassuring tone does not carry throughout the remainder of the themes. As the teachers began to open up about the realities of day to day instruction and their reactions to these struggles, their responses got more specific and more real. While for the most part they did not contradict these earlier thoughts, they did begin to paint a more realistic picture of the effects of CCSS.

Realities of Common Core

As the teachers moved further into the interviews and I had an opportunity to observe their classrooms and explore their lesson planning, it became clear that the generally positive, easy-going thoughts initially communicated regarding CCSS may only be surface deep. In actuality the execution of CCSS is a day to day challenge in this second year of implementation. This doesn't mean that everything about this change is seen as a difficulty by these participants, just that it may be more of a challenge than they first indicated. Eight open codes fed into this axial code of the *Realities of Common Core*: (a) *Common Core Struggles*, (b) *More Time*, (c) *Not Enough Time*, (d) *Units*, (e) *Depth*, (f) *Expectations*, (g) *Assessments*, and (h) *Understanding by Design*.

Several statements made in the interviews represent this theme. Dana stated, "We still live in two worlds with six week literacy units yet still bound by teaching science and social studies with the frameworks." Clara explained, "It is drastic in the way we were teaching before…it seemed more relaxed. Now it isn't relaxed." Faye described, "Resources are tough. Looking for those harder questions…looking for that rigor…putting that rigor in place. The expectations…knowing my expectations were here and that was great but now my expectations are up here." Clara identified, "The shift has made us think deeper into what kids need before they move onto second grade." and There is "no time for anything except what Common Core

asks us to teach." Faye discussed the difficulties with the new teaching and planning methods, "I think it is hard for teachers to look at assessments first and see what they have to teach…the whole backwards design model…it is hard to pinpoint." She also pointed out, "If [Common Core] sticks, you will have a lot of teachers who are very well versed in those units."

It was noted by Faye that the newer teachers seem to be having less of a struggle with this shift. "I also notice with our interns coming in that they are up on all this…it is impossible to stay ahead of [them]. [They] don't need my help. They are going into it as Common Core so they don't have all that other stuff. The older teachers are having to switch gears and that is the harder part."

Shifting Literacy Paradigm

The axial code *Shifting Literacy Paradigm* speaks to the ways in which CCSS is changing literacy instruction specifically and how teachers are responding to this change in a tangible way. It also encompasses their thoughts regarding the reasoning for this shift and why it is acceptable for them to change their literacy practices. Five open codes fed into this axial code: (a) *Teachers Choosing Books*, (b) *Exposure*, (c) *Frequency of Use and Availability of Informational Texts,* (d) *Types of Informational Texts*, and (e) *Learning Styles*.

The participants cannot deny that CCSS is requiring them to teach literacy in a different way, using different tools and materials. These participants each have their own way of thinking regarding how kids learn to read and what supports must be in place for this to happen. They also see the types of skills CCSS is demanding from students and they have adjusted their teaching to make this happen.

Statements supporting this code include: (a) Kids must be "exposed to many different types of nonfiction or informational text so they can have exposure to all these different things."

(Dana), (b) "Kids learn by doing and they have to be actively engaged…I use real objects when I have a chance." (Anne), and (c) "We choose books that will be appropriate for what we are trying to teach." (Clara).

While it was observed that classroom libraries are still lacking a balance of informational text to literature (between 24% and 45% informational text was noted in observation data), it was discussed in the interviews that the exposure balance in instructional activities is approaching the 50/50 mark mandated in CCSS. The only teacher that disputed this balance and seemed a reluctant hold-out was Anne who reported that she only used informational text "two to three times a month". Dana reported that she uses informational text "at least four times a week...in some aspect of instruction" while Emily feels her instruction is "probably 80% informational" (although this last statement was not supported by the observational data nor the three months of lesson plan data collected from this second grade classroom).

Another way in which teachers are adjusting to this shifting literacy paradigm is through the materials used within instruction. This switch was noted in the observational data as well as the lesson plan data. Teachers were using online resources, magazines such as National Geographic for Kids, and informational trade books as student research and exploration tools. Prior to using these tools, teachers gave students a purpose for their work as well as time to explore the texts and find enjoyment in them.

Support for Teachers and Students

The axial code *Support for Teachers and Students* encompasses the variety of means and levels of support in place to give both teachers and students a bit of structure and encouragement during this change toward CCSS. Seven open codes fed into this axial code: (a) *Curriculum Support*, (b) *Encouragement*, (c) *Gradual Release*, (d) *Schema*, (e) *Zone of Proximal*

Development, (f) *Student Support*, and (g) *Supporting Understanding about Informational Texts*. The curriculum support was in place for the teachers as they made this change. In turn their knowledge about child development and teaching fed into the support they provided for students. This continued further into the palpable supports in place within each classroom in order for students to feel successful with these new and challenging expectations.

The teachers were receiving more curriculum support than ever before during this initial phase of CCSS implementation. While these supports were in place at the time of the study, they were not found prior to implementation in order to prepare teachers for this shift. The supports were coming in the form of increased Professional Development sessions, modeled lessons in teachers' classrooms, grade level team lesson plan writing, scripted curriculum, and curriculum kits with informational texts to support student learning at each grade level.

Teachers were using their knowledge of how students develop and learn to plan appropriate instruction in the classroom and to support students' learning.   They were using their understanding of students' schema and zone of proximal development to plan instruction. Dana mentioned there is an "optimal place where it's not too difficult but we are challenging them and pushing them beyond where their level of comfort is…I feel like I am constantly in that. I have a greater percentage of time in that optimal place and I am pushing them in a heavily supported, positive way." In addition, teachers used the Gradual Release of Responsibility model (Fisher & Frey, 2008) when teaching as evidenced in the interviews and observations to support students. Becky described her instruction as "we are doing kind of a gradual release where I am modeling it, doing some reading aloud, then some partner work and independent work differentiated based on where they are."

Simply the way classrooms were structured was also a support for students' learning. Anchor charts were noted in every classroom and the Kindergarten classrooms in particular were heavily language-rich with labels and environmental print present on classroom walls. Teachers also made efforts to provide informational texts at the reading levels of the students in the classroom in order to ensure success with new material. Clara explained "the material isn't always available in kid friendly language so I am having to write articles myself. I will take the information I am reading and write it in kid friendly language and attach a picture to it with a caption." Faye was observed using this same technique during a modeled lesson in Emily's classroom. She had synthesized several informational texts the students had been using on the topic of cacti into one informational piece for a close-read with the students.

More specifically it was observed that teachers support students' understanding of informational texts through a variety of explorations and questioning techniques. Students in Dana's class were repeatedly asked "Is this fiction or nonfiction?" In Clara's class the questioning was observed to go a bit further and students were asked to explain their thinking about the type of texts they were reading. "What is the difference between fiction and nonfiction? Did you hear that? Fiction is not real but nonfiction is real. Nonfiction has interesting features and they give us information to learn."

Kids and Informational Texts

The axial code *Kids and Informational Texts* speaks directly to the reactions teachers perceive from students in regard to informational texts and the responses observed from the students directly from the classroom observations. This code also included one of the reasons teachers used to explain why kids may indeed like this genre of texts. The axial code emerged from two of the open codes, (a) *Curiosity* and (b) *Kids Like Informational Texts*.

It has long been noted through various studies in child development that children are naturally curious beings (Norton, 2011; Piaget, 1973; Piaget, 1976). Understanding this innate curiosity and more specifically which things individual children are curious about can make teaching easier and more relevant to the students in a teacher's classroom. Dana referenced this "natural curiosity" several times throughout her interview and even used it to explain how students are possibly more interested in informational texts than they are literature. Students are "naturally curious about so many thing and many times [informational text] is what they are naturally drawn to and what they want to select."

This natural curiosity and preference for informational texts was noted in other interviews as well as the classroom observation data. In fact only one of the teachers interviewed contradicted the idea of kids enjoying informational text. Anne was adamant that "they really like fiction and fantasy books a lot. The nonfiction, they aren't that interested in." The other four teachers and Faye repeatedly mentioned students' interest in the nonfiction genre both during instructional time and when given opportunities to independently select texts.

Additional support for this code was found in the participants' interviews. Dana said, "Students lean a bit more toward informational text because they enjoy reading the facts." Clara was surprised by the interest and explained it this way, "The children seem to like the nonfiction a lot more than I thought because they are finding out this is really cool, now I am smarter." Emily said, "We wanted to encourage them to read informational text but now it has turned out that is what they really like and are choosing." Faye continued, "Kids like the facts. They want to learn more about that because it is real life. That is something they can touch. It is something we have facts about. So I think is has been an easy switch."

These statements made during interviews were confirmed within the observational data. Students were observed choosing informational text as their independent reading choice without prompting from their teachers. They not only chose these texts on their own, often times they would work extra diligently on their required tasks so they could read an informational text as observed in the following experience:

> During read-to-self time in Dana's classroom, a mother involved in the Family Literacy class came in to read with her son. She joined him on the floor as he was reading the books in his browsing basket. Prior to her coming in he was working but was also repeatedly distracted by his peers also reading on the floor. She joined him and his attention was focused. He hurried to read all the books in his browsing basket so he could get an informational text about floods from the classroom library. As he was reading this informational book he was also teaching his mother. He questioned as he read and then showed his mother how to look through the text for the answers. He appeared more motivated and more engaged in this book than in any of the others he read during this read-to-self time.

This student excitement toward informational text was also evident in other classrooms. Students commented about the texts they were reading and appeared impatient and excited to share their thoughts and finding with both teachers and peers. They were also observed as they made connections from the informational texts they chose to read with previous instruction in the class. In Clara's classroom one student was heard to say "WOW! Remember this? It's like our big science book!" In this same classroom a student sitting beside me during his read-to-self time couldn't wait to share the informational text he was reading. He told me that he was "very interested in nonfiction because I like to learn new things." He was using the features they had been learning about in class to make the most of his reading experience. I observed him referring to the labels, index, and bolded words as he read.

Teaching Using Informational Texts

The axial code *Teaching Using Informational Texts* came from the interview, classroom observation, and lesson plan data sources. The code encompasses all the avenues through which teachers were using informational text in their classrooms as well as the methods through which they were teaching their students to use informational text. This code includes six open codes: (a) *Appropriately Respond to Informational Texts*, (b) *Informational Writing*, (c) *Organize Information*, (d) *Reading Informational Texts*, (e) *Text Features*, and (f) *Utilize Informational Texts*.

Teachers were choosing a variety of methods for reading informational texts such as using them for shared reading in Kindergarten and first grade classrooms and read aloud texts with a focus on comprehension strategies in first and second grade classrooms. Students across all classrooms were told that the informational texts were stories about real people or events, things that really happened, and that it provides information. Dana explained her goal is that students know "how to read it and interpret it and pull facts from that and they really know how to use informational text." This knowing "how to use informational text" was evident in how the teachers organized information in their classrooms to support students' understanding. Students and teachers created anchor charts for classroom walls. Students were taught to make a "web of ideas" in Dana's classroom and to utilize a variety of graphic organizers in Emily's classroom. Clara also mentioned that Faye has been a key resource for teaching both teachers and students to "organize their thinking."

Text features such as glossary, bolded words, labels, table of contents, photographs, captions, index, charts and graphs, headings, and author's notes were explicitly taught in the participants' classrooms. Not only were these things taught by the teachers, the students were

observed to be using these during their own independent reading time to make meaning from their texts.

Teachers also taught students to use informational texts as resources for research projects and informational writing. Faye has spent a good deal of time teaching the second grade students to look back in the text and find evidence to support the statements they make in their writing. For example, when discussing Abraham Lincoln and the fact that he attended school as a boy she directed the students to go back to their reading. The students discovered they knew "he was educated because in the book it talked about how he went to school and even when he was young he walked two miles. There is the proof that he went to school." Students read many informational texts on a topic and the end result was typically crafting a piece of informational writing depicting a synthesis of this knowledge.

Selective Coding

Selective coding is the final step in the data analysis process in case study and grounded theory analysis. This is the process through which the final story is developed which will describe the interrelatedness of the categories from the previous coding sessions (Creswell, 2007). The end result of this selective coding process was the creation of a flowchart to explain the understandings present in these five classrooms and their shift toward CCSS and more informational text.

In this stage of the analysis the six axial codes condensed even further and became four sequential categories. The final categories as well as the axial codes and open codes that align with them can be found in Table 9.

Table 9

Final Data Categories with Subsequent Axial and Open Codes

Selective Coding Categories	Axial Codes	Open Codes
Common Core Implementation	• How We Want to Think about Common Core • Realities of Common Core	• Assessments • Common Core Impressions • Common Core Struggles • Depth • Expectations • More Time • Not Enough Time • Understanding by Design • Units • Whole Language
Paradigm Shift	• Shifting Literacy Paradigm • Kids and Informational Texts	• Curiosity • Exposure • Frequency of Use and Availability of Informational Texts • Kids Like Informational Texts • Learning Styles • Teachers Choosing Books • Types of Informational Texts
Support	• Support for Teachers and Students	• Curriculum Support • Encouragement • Gradual Release • Schema • Student Support • Supporting Understanding about Informational Texts • Zone of Proximal Development
Focus on Informational Texts	• Teaching Using Informational Texts	• Appropriately Respond to Informational Texts • Informational Writing • Organize Information • Reading Informational Texts • Text Features • Utilize Informational Texts

During this selective coding process the two axial codes focusing on CCSS became one category labeled *Common Core Implementation*. While the axial code *How We Want to Think about Common Core* represents mostly positive feelings toward CCSS and the axial code *Realities of Common Core* represent the more practical side of this issue, both codes are speaking to the implementation of these standards. Taken together, these two codes provide a more complete picture of this phenomenon during the point in time represented by this case study.
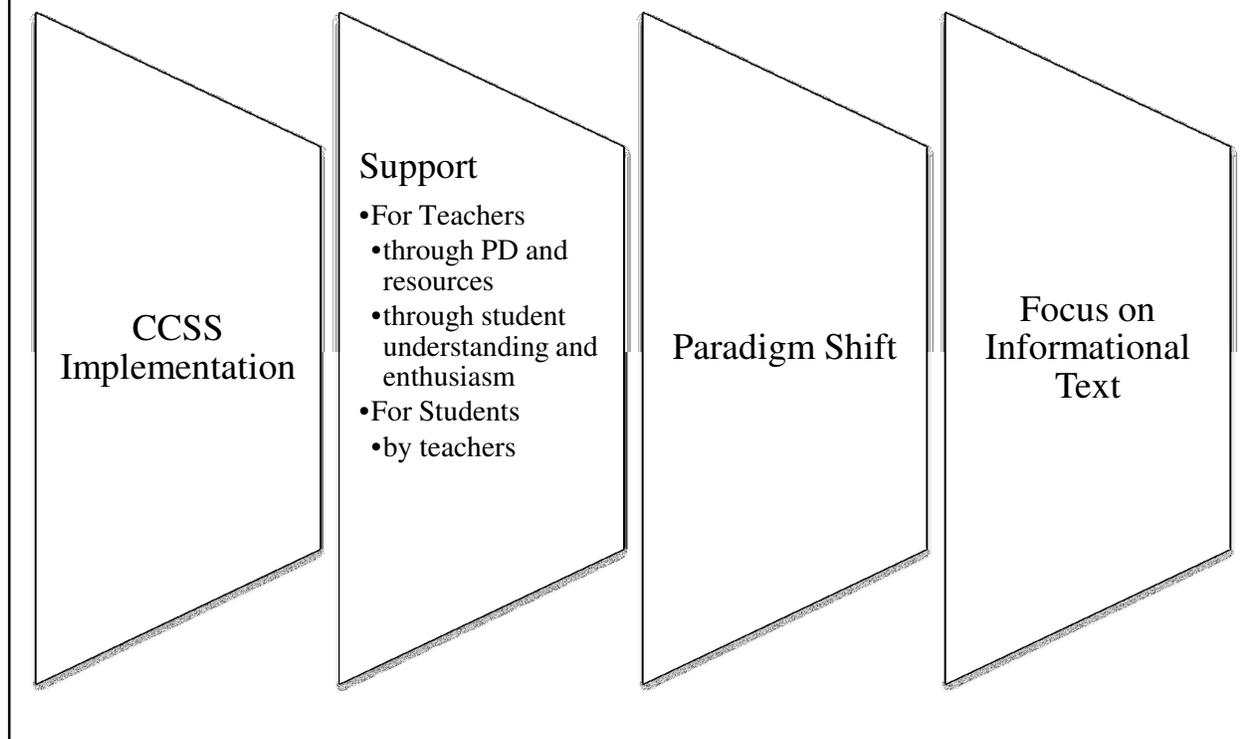
The axial codes *Shifting Literacy Paradigm* and *Kids and Informational Text* combined to form the category *Paradigm Shift*. The ideas represented in this category are all support for this new way of thinking about kids, teaching, and learning. Yes, the thinking is heavily represented in the area of literacy and through the use of informational text but the ideas here are larger. These ideas represent a shift in how the teachers in this study perceive the way students think and a shift in what they believe students enjoy. Teachers back up these new ways of thinking with what they know about children's cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development.

The final two categories in this selective coding process are each represented by one axial code from the previous stage of the analysis process. *Support for Teachers and Students* was relabeled to simply indicate *Support*. *Teaching Using Informational Texts* was relabeled as *Focus on Informational Texts*. Their descriptions did not change from the axial coding process.

These categories emerged from the data in an order that allowed me to understand how this implementation of CCSS has affected these teachers, their thinking about literacy, and the subsequent changes in their classrooms. The flowchart is depicted in Figure 2. The chart is applied to the studied classrooms in the next chapter, Conclusions.

Figure 2.

Flowchart Depicting Selective Coding Categories

| CCSS Implementation | Support
•For Teachers
  •through PD and resources
  •through student understanding and enthusiasm
•For Students
  •by teachers | Paradigm Shift | Focus on Informational Text |

Summary

Data were found in the participants' interviews, classroom observations, and lesson plans leading to an inductive understanding of the progression from CCSS implementation to a new focus on informational texts in the studied elementary classrooms. During interviews, teachers discussed how CCSS was being implemented in their classrooms along with the support they were receiving and the challenges they were facing. These supports and challenges were detected in both the classroom observations and the self-reported lesson plans leading to a greater understanding of the day-to-day working relationship these teachers have with CCSS and the ways in which instruction has changed for their students, along with how students are responding to this shifting paradigm. Data provided by the participants, as well as my close

proximity to the students during instructional time, provided confirmation that this shift toward

the use of more informational text in these primary classrooms has been one of the easiest

hurdles to overcome in this shifting educational paradigm.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this descriptive case study was to discover what teaching strategies were being presented in regard to informational text in Kindergarten through second grade classrooms as well as how often teachers were using them. I also described how the newly implemented CCSS have changed teachers' practices and philosophies regarding the teaching of literacy. The research design methodology involved the analysis of interviews, observations, and lesson plans from a sample of five teachers in Kindergarten through second grade and an interview with one elementary instructional facilitator in a mid-South elementary school.

The central research question explored in this case study was "How are informational texts used, read, and incorporated into these Kindergarten, first, and second grade classrooms in this new realm of CCSS?" This question was enhanced by four sub questions:

1. How has the implementation of CCSS changed literacy teaching practices or philosophies?

2. In what ways do the teachers support students' developing understandings about informational texts?

3. In what ways do teachers provide opportunities for students to engage with informational text?

4. In what ways do teachers draw attention to informational text features?

According to Creswell (2007), case study research is an inquiry-based design that explores a central phenomenon. Discovery of understanding guided my research rather than confirmation of research propositions (Glaser & Strauss, 2009). This descriptive case study borrowed from both the case study and the grounded theory research designs during the data

analysis phase to gain a deeper understanding of how informational texts were being used and perceived in these Kindergarten through second grade classrooms during the implementation of CCSS. During the 14-week data collection period, six participants (five classroom teachers and one instructional facilitator) were interviewed. The five classroom teachers were also observed in their classroom environment and asked to supply copies of their weekly lesson plans for analysis. The data were analyzed for emerging codes and themes.

Significant Findings

Four major themes emerged from the data in the form of a flowchart (Figure 2) to explain how the teachers in this case study had implemented CCSS in their classrooms and what had led to the use of more informational text as the standards mandated. CCSS *Implementation* was mandated, followed by *Support* for both teachers and students which in turn led to a *Paradigm Shift*, making the *Focus on Informational Texts* an acceptable outcome. It is important to note that if there was a breakdown in any step of this flowchart, I observed that this process reached a stalemate. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

At the time of this case study, Kindergartens through second grade classrooms across this mid-South state were in the second year of full implementation with CCSS. It was widely perceived that the shift to CCSS from the previous set of curriculum frameworks was done abruptly with little to no preparation for the teachers in the state. These thoughts emerged from the data and were represented in the selective code *Common Core Implementation*. I further discovered through participant interviews that teachers held positive thoughts toward CCSS because it offered them more of a "focus" on what to teach, allowed them to provide a "better education" for their students, and created opportunities for "deeper" teaching and learning experiences. The teachers with fewer than five years of experience felt that because of CCSS

they had more time to focus on the concepts their students truly needed. In addition, many of the teachers with 20+ years of experience initially discussed that it wasn't that difficult to implement because they saw it as a throwback to the whole-language, thematic-unit way of teaching.

Upon further examination regarding the implementation of CCSS I discovered that the teachers opened up about the challenges they were facing. When discussing the struggles, the teachers with greater than 20 years of experience contradicted the idea from their less experienced colleagues regarding time; they seemed to feel as if there wasn't enough time to teach all they needed. Clara, the experienced first grade teacher explained the time phenomenon in this way:

> [CCSS] has completely eliminated "fluff". We have no time for anything expect what Common Core asks us to teach. Because of it going deeper there is so much that needs to be done to make it deep. I am learning that. The first year we tried to implement, I think I was still hanging on to the past, trying to fit all that in. The second year was a little bit better because I got rid of some of that stuff we were doing to fill in. Now there is no time. In fact, all the stuff that I collected we call it the "fluff folder" now. It's not bad things that I have in that folder; it's just that we have no time to do those things anymore. The shift has made us think deeper into what kids need before they move onto second grade. It is drastic in the way we were teaching before. It seemed more relaxed…now it isn't relaxed.

Another challenge I discovered was the fact that grade level teams in this school had to share one set of resources for the units they were required to teach among the four classrooms in each grade level. These units were all taught at the same time so essentially the resources were needed at the same moment in all of the classrooms. Several challenges beyond the sharing of resources surfaced in the curriculum itself. For example, the units were seen as both a strength and a challenge. The administration at the school district level had mandated the use of specific units to be taught in sequence at each grade level. These units of study were taken from *Common Core Curriculum Maps: English Language Arts* (2012), published by Jossey-Bass. I noticed that a few of the teachers in this study associated this book directly as CCSS. In fact,

when discussing the implementation of CCSS in the interviews, more than one teacher immediately put their hands on this text and flipped through it as they answered the questions. More revealing yet was a comment made by Faye in response to this text. She said, "If [CCSS] sticks you will have a lot of teachers who are very well versed in those units"; not well versed in curriculum design, not content, not students and their learning, but well-versed in "*those units*".

The assessments to come with CCSS were also seen as a challenge to be overcome during this implementation. Many study participants shared their uneasiness regarding these assessments because even though the schools are teaching using CCSS, they have yet to see what the new CCSS assessments will look like. Schools are still conducting high stakes tests each spring that assesses the learning from the previous set of curriculum frameworks. This creates a large disconnect between the learning taking place throughout the school year and the assessment administered at the conclusion of the school year. This, coupled with the pressure associated with high-stakes testing, has created some additional stress and feelings of anxiety even in these pre-high-stakes testing grades. They too feel the gravity of these assessments as one participant communicated, "We have to do our part to get them ready. Even though they aren't testing for us I know there is pressure all the way down to Kindergarten to get them ready."

All of these ideas taken together create a picture of the CCSS implementation in these five teachers' classrooms at this school. While these teachers were attempting to put a positive spin on this change, they were also feeling quite a bit of pressure to implement these standards in the way they have been told to by their administration in a very brief span of time with little or no preparation. This lack of preparation was noted both by the district for the teachers and by the teachers for the students which leads into the next selective code, *Support*.

Shortly following the implementation of CCSS it was discovered that in order to correctly shift to CCSS teachers would need some support. This support was given through extensive professional development sessions provided by the state's Department of Education, the area educational cooperative, the school district, and this school's Instructional Facilitator, Faye. Additional support for the teachers came in the form of modeled lessons conducted by Faye within the classrooms regarding the use of informational text and appropriate strategies to use when teaching this genre. The district has also provided physical resources and book sets for each grade level to use when teaching the mandated *Common Core Curriculum Maps* units.

As teachers increased their use of CCSS they noticed that students would also need support for a successful change to be possible. Teachers discerned that new teaching methods would have to be implemented such as the Gradual Release of Responsibility (Fisher & Frey, 2008). The tasks that students were being asked to do with CCSS were increasingly complex and required more critical and analytical thinking than tasks required under the previous set of curriculum frameworks. Students were not able to simply go from direct instruction to independent practice and demonstrate competence in their work. Additional support through the use of modeling and cooperative learning was required prior to the independent practice portion of learning. There was also an increased focus on the development of students' schema prior to the introduction of a new topic or vocabulary. Teachers began to notice that because they had begun implementing these new ways of teaching, students were spending more time in their own individual Zones of Proximal Development. As Dana explained in her interview, each student has an "optimal place where it's not too difficult but we are challenging them and pushing them beyond where their level of comfort is. I feel like I am constantly in that. I have a greater

percentage of time in that optimal place and I am pushing them further in a heavily supported, positive way."

Not only were teachers offering more support for students in the area of background knowledge and modeling, they were offering specific encouragements as their students were working to achieve the complex tasks required from CCSS. I also noticed that teachers were explicitly supporting students' understanding of informational texts, an area of text brought to the forefront by the CCSS mandate of 50% informational / 50% literature in classrooms by fourth grade. Teachers were supporting this understanding through the use of think-alouds during instruction with informational texts, explicit questioning techniques, and by requiring students to explain their own thinking in a deeper way.

Once all of this support was in place, teachers indicated they felt more comfortable and began to notice other aspects and products of CCSS. In a way, they resigned themselves to the inevitability of this change yet started to notice things within their students that made this gargantuan task seem less prodigious. This led to the next selective code, *Paradigm Shift*.

Teachers noticed a characteristic in their students that may have been overlooked during the realm of checklists of skills to teach followed by multiple-choice high-stakes tests; children are innately curious beings. Teachers have known this but for the past several years in education, students were rarely allowed to act on that curiosity in classrooms. CCSS brought with it a greater depth of teaching and the tasks students were asked to complete allowed them to apply this inquisitiveness.

Another tool that came to prominence with CCSS was the genre of informational text. Researchers have long been aware of students' interest in this genre and the importance of teaching students to fully utilize these texts early in their educational career (Duke, 2000; Jeong

et al., 2010; Saul & Dieckman, 2005). However, many teachers have been reluctant to use these texts with young children based on their own biases, which they often translate into student disinterest (Duke et al, 2003). The teachers in this study began using informational text because they were required to with CCSS. However, they discovered that their students enjoyed using informational text and would often choose it outside of instruction for their own independent reading. This discovery led to teachers choosing more and more informational text for their instruction. They began selecting different types of informational texts and even began collecting more of this genre for the classroom libraries so students would have access to more high-quality informational text that was appropriate for their reading levels. This was truly a new way of thinking regarding students and text from these teachers' perspectives. Once they discovered this interest, the switch to CCSS became easier. It was as if they gave themselves permission to shift their teaching paradigm. Even though these teachers had been told students would enjoy informational texts prior to the CCSS implementation, they had yet to experience it. Their beliefs and attitudes had not changed. Nespor (1987) states that beliefs and attitudes are often resistant to contradictory knowledge. In order to change the belief system, these teachers had to *experience* informational text in a manner that would cause them to see the impact it could have on their students (Kindall & Penner-Williams, 2013). When all of these pieces came together, a *Paradigm Shift* was noted in these classrooms which led to the final selective code, *Focus on Informational Text*.

The result of that shift was a new way of teaching using a large percentage of informational texts. Suddenly these teachers were using informational text as their primary means of instruction, not just for literacy but for science and social studies as well. Students were encouraged to choose this type of text for independent reading, although Emily pointed out,

"…that is what they really like and are choosing. It started out as a rule but it hasn't been a problem."

The teachers in this study not only taught students that informational text was a genre that provides factual information, they utilized these texts as evident in the various teaching methods observed in their classrooms and documented in their lesson plans. They were teaching students to look for text features and then utilize these to assist in the comprehension of their own reading. The teachers were reading informational texts during shared reading and read-alouds, pointing out text structures and features. Students were encouraged to use informational texts as resources for research projects and as evidence to support their own writing. Teachers were creating student-friendly informational texts on topics when a grade appropriate text can't be found. They were also teaching students to organize their thinking through the use of graphic organizers and anchor charts. These were no longer displays that were created and then forgotten; students were frequently encouraged to use these tools during their cooperative and independent work times. I discovered that these changes to instruction largely came in response to this paradigm shift and the implementation of CCSS.

The Exception to the Rule

As stated earlier in this chapter, the flowchart (Figure 2) that emerged as an end result of the data analysis was not followed by each participant within this bounded case. One teacher did not follow the pattern of the remaining four. She recognized the challenges of CCSS, as did her colleagues, but solely likened the implementation back to the whole language thematic unit approach from her early years of teaching. She repeatedly bemoaned the fact that she didn't have time to teach everything that she felt needed to be taught. I noticed many inconsistencies in her interview with regard to CCSS. She discussed the structure of her classroom saying "I don't

think I do any different" while in the next statement mentioning CCSS was "changing what [she

was] teaching". She stated there was "no structure" though in the next breath talked about her

idea that it was now "too structured". She believed she had implemented CCSS as found in her

Common Core Curriculum Maps text yet she brought to my mind a statement made by the

instructional facilitator during her interview:

> I think teachers may think they are going deeper but is our thinking going deeper?
> Are we asking those higher level questions? Are we expecting more rigor?
> …Teachers feel like that is what they are doing…because I am teaching the
> Common Core so that is what I am doing…I must be doing that…

I perceived that this teacher had a breakdown in the understanding that emerged into the

flowchart toward a *Focus on Informational Texts*. She received the same *Supports* from the

state, district, and school as the other participants but her breakdown occurred at the point of

providing CCSS specific support to the students in her classroom. In turn, she did not allow

herself to acknowledge that children enjoy informational text. She was the sole teacher in the

study who mentioned her idea that kids "really like fiction and fantasy books a lot". While this

is true, she hasn't allowed herself to experience the notion that students also really like

informational text. She only used it two or three times a month because they just "[weren't] that

interested in" it. She did not truly implement CCSS in her classroom so therefore she was not

providing the support necessary to develop an understanding for informational text within her

students.

Findings Related to Research Questions

Four major themes in the CCSS implementation leading to informational text use in the

elementary classroom emerged: (a) *CCSS Implementation*, (b) *Support*, (c) *Paradigm Shift*, and

(d) *Focus on Informational Text*. The findings below, categorized into each of the four sub

questions for the study, all funnel into and combine to answer the central research question, "How are informational texts used, read, and incorporated into these Kindergarten, first, and second grade classrooms in this new realm of CCSS?"

Summary of findings for sub question 1. The first research sub question asked, "How has the implementation of CCSS changed literacy teaching practices or philosophies?" The answer to this question can be found within all four of the selective codes: (a) *CCSS Implementation*, (b) *Support*, (c) *Paradigm Shift*, and (d) *Focus on Informational Texts*.

There were four teachers in this bounded case that appeared to embrace CCSS and all the strengths, changes, and challenges it brought. They have not embraced it blindly, rather they recognized that it was difficult; CCSS was changing the focus of their classrooms and it was changing the way they taught. Two of the more experienced teachers in the study acknowledged their struggles with the uncertain new assessments, the increased expectations, and the fight to fit in all they felt they needed to teach. The newer teachers in the study mentioned that CCSS allowed them to design curriculum and teach in the ways they felt they should; they found it was easier to employ the practices they had been taught in their teacher preparation programs. These newer teachers also felt they had more time now to focus on the things that should receive more emphasis; they didn't have to cover material and move on before their students were ready.

It was discovered that while philosophies may not have changed due to CCSS, some aspects of the teachers' philosophies were now playing a more central role in their approach to teaching and learning. They were focusing on the learning styles of their students and choosing books and instructional strategies that more closely aligned with these learning styles. They were also becoming increasingly cognizant of the innate curiosity central to the development in young children (Norton, 2011; Piaget, 1973; Piaget 1976). There was a stronger reliance on the

building of schema and the significance of a student's zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). These teachers were also realizing the value of using the gradual release of responsibility model to support students' understanding of concepts (Fisher & Frey, 2008).

This new focus in these four teachers' philosophies was found to have led to different avenues of instruction and altered instructional materials from the teaching they implemented with the previous set of curriculum frameworks. Due to the realization that students were capable of the new and challenging tasks demanded in CCSS and the mindfulness that the students actually enjoyed informational texts, four of the teachers allowed their mindset to change. They embraced the use of informational text in their instruction and encouraged students to read it during their independent reading times. These teachers geared their instruction in literacy toward the understanding of informational text features and organization as well as the continued understanding of the fictional story structure. They implemented more research writing and shared research projects with their students within the content areas of science and social studies and taught them how to use the tools that would facilitate success with these assignments. Their literacy instruction changed because their perspective changed. Their focus was on their students and their students were embracing this paradigm shift toward informational texts. This experiential knowledge made it safe for them to accept a shift in attitude and belief (Nespor, 1987).

Summary of findings for sub question 2. The second research sub question asked, "In what ways do the teachers support students' developing understandings about informational texts?" The answer to this sub question can be found in two of the selective codes: (a) *Support* and (b) *Focus on Informational Text*.

The four teachers who embraced the use of informational text in their classroom were found to develop and support their students' understanding of this genre in a multitude of ways. They used photographs of real objects to build students' schemas for new vocabulary. They employed a more gradual release of responsibilities when introducing new projects involving informational texts and they allowed students to work collaboratively to complete their research projects involving informational texts. This scaffolding was evident in the use of small groups working alongside the teacher for additional support as needed.

Teachers in all three grade levels supported students' developing understanding by creating anchor charts on informational text and their features which were later displayed on the classroom walls. These anchor charts were created collaboratively with the students so they represented the thinking of the students in that classroom. The students were encouraged to read both informational texts and fictional texts and were allowed to share the interesting findings in these texts with each other and with their teacher. Harvey and Goudvis (2000) support the use of connections to facilitate comprehension. The four teachers supporting students' understanding of informational text were observed encouraging connections of informational texts read to other areas of the curriculum aside from just literacy.

Additionally, these same four teachers and their instructional facilitator modeled strategies for breaking apart information found in this text genre and using it in appropriate ways. Students were taught to take notes and record their questions during a close-read of informational

text and were then further encouraged to cite where their information came from within their research projects. Graphic organizers can be used as a means of organizing students' thinking in regard to new information specifically with the nonfiction genre (Joyce, 2006; Vukelich, Evans, & Albertson, 2003). Informational text is a genre with multiple text structures and the teachers in this study were seen to develop a deeper understanding of this genre and the content these texts presented through the use of various graphic organizers. Some of these organizers were then used in the construction of informational writing; some of them were simply used to aid in the comprehension of the text read.

Two of the teachers studied further supported their students' developing understandings of informational text by creating their own text when a student-friendly text could not be found on the topic of study. They employed the use of challenging vocabulary in a supported setting (Graves, 2006) and included text features appropriate to informational text so students would have exposure to these features during instructional time rather than solely during independent reading time.

Summary of findings for sub question 3. The third research sub question asked, "In what ways do teachers provide opportunities for students to engage with informational text?" The answer to this sub question can be found in two of the selective codes: (a) *Paradigm Shift* and (b) *Focus on Informational Texts*.

The teachers in this case study were found to have informational texts included within their classroom libraries. The percentage was determined during the first classroom observation during the data collection period yet it was noticed that the teachers would routinely change out these available books depending on the unit of study in the classroom. During this first observation the teachers were found to have between 24% and 45% informational text in their

classroom libraries. In addition, the four teachers embracing this paradigm shift toward informational text also had browsing boxes for each student near those students' workstations. These browsing boxes were used for independent reading, or read-to-self time, and were composed of a mixture of fiction and informational text genres.

The types of informational text shared with students included nonfiction trade books, online references, magazines written for kids such as Ranger Rick and National Geographic for Kids, dictionaries, thesauruses, and student newspapers such as Scholastic News. These different types of informational texts were used for exploration, teaching tools, and as research tools. Many times the texts featured content that was the focus of the science or social studies unit being studied. Other times they were used during the literacy block to illustrate different text structures or informational text features. Each time I observed students using these different formats of informational texts they were engaged and excited as they discovered new information to share with their classmates and teachers.

One Kindergarten teacher and both of the first grade teachers were observed using informational text during shared reading sessions and engaging students in the text through the use of questioning and connections. These texts were typically read using either a big book or a book under the document camera so all the students could easily see the information and features. The teachers used pointers or their finger to track the print, often focusing on print concepts such as the title, author, and cover page. The students' connections were encouraged as the books were read and many times additional background information was shared using a movie clip or other informational source from the internet. Many times this shared reading was followed by a writing activity, often informational writing or research involving the informational texts read.

The second grade teacher in the study used informational text as a read aloud. Her primary goal as stated in her lesson plans were for the students to be able to "ask and answer questions such as who, what, where, when, and why". They were also using informational books as a support for text-to-text and text-to-world connections to historical events. This was observed through the use of several biographical picture books when studying the Civil Rights Movement and freedoms. As in the lower grades, these read-alouds were typically followed by some type of writing activity; the difference was that these would routinely begin with a graphic organizer prior to actually composing the writing piece.

All four of the teachers who regularly included informational text in their instruction were observed encouraging students to use this genre as a means of supporting their writing. They were teaching students to "go back and look for information in the text" and to refer to anchor charts hung in the classroom as informational resources. This referencing information became such a routine that eventually students began doing this independently without reminders from their teachers.

Another concept noticed in the first and second grade classrooms was the use of the term "expert" in relation to someone who writes informational text about specific topics. The students were encouraged to discover topics they were "experts" in so they might in turn write about this topic and teach their classmates. Students were observed making lists of expert ideas and then expanding those lists into simple informational writings. Many of these informational writings focused on the topic of inventors or animals in first grade and bridges or freedom in second grade. The students were encouraged to develop these writings on their own utilizing the informational text resources available in their room in the form of anchor charts, posters, and various types of text.

Summary of findings for sub question 4. The final research sub question asked, "In what ways do teachers draw attention to informational text features?" This sub question can be answered primarily through the selective code *Focus on Informational Texts* and more specifically through the embedded open code *Text Features*.

Each grade level has a list of CCSS requirements regarding which informational text features should receive the focus. These lists are a beginning place for instruction but I noted that other features were often discussed that were not on this list but rather were added because students would notice them or ask questions requiring that feature to be referenced.

CCSS requires Kindergarten students be able to identify the front and back covers of a book as well as the title page (NGA & CCSSO, 2012). These tasks were observed being taught in Becky's classroom with each shared reading conducted using an informational text. In addition, students in this classroom were introduced to bolded words in text and taught that the glossary will give them the definitions of these words. They were also taught about labels and captions, diagrams, and table of contents. The students in this classroom were actively questioning the teacher when they would notice a new text feature and she would always take the time to not only give them an explanation, but illustrate it through the use of the feature as well.

CCSS requires first grade students to be familiar with "headings, tables of contents, glossaries, electronic menus, and icons". The standards require students not only be familiar with these features but to "use various text features to locate key facts or information in a text" (NGA & CCCSO, 2010, p. 13). Students in both first grade classrooms were observed being instructed in the use of all of the above except electronic menus and icons. In addition to the list above, the first graders in this study were also familiar with photographs, captions, bolded words, indexes, tables, graphs, labels, maps, sidebars, and diagrams. They were encouraged to use these

features when utilizing informational text for assignments or research projects. Anchor charts

depicting student thinking and classroom knowledge of informational text features were

observed on the classroom walls. Additionally students were questioned on the text features and

asked to justify their use of these features during instruction. A few of the questions asked of the

first grade students regarding the analysis of informational text features were:

"Describe what is meant by nonfiction features."

"What difficulties could a reader have if there were no table of contents in a

nonfiction text?"

"Explain why an author would use a map in a text."

"How is a map similar to a chart in nonfiction texts?"

"What is the purpose of a caption?"

"What would be another good title for the book featured today?"

"What other labels could you add to the illustration?"

"Explain how an index can help a reader."

"Name at least one thing you learned from looking at the graph."

"What other parts could you label in the diagram we added to our booklet?"

"What would you say is the most important part to label on the illustration you

drew?"

CCSS requires second grade students to "know and use various text features (e.g.,

captions, bold print, subheadings, glossaries, indexes, electronic menus, icons) to locate key facts

or information in a text efficiently" (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p. 13). In addition, second grade

students should be able to "explain how specific images (e.g., a diagram showing how a machine

works) contribute to and clarify a text" (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p. 13). The students in Emily's

classroom were observed to be using captions, pictures, headings, author's notes, and diagrams. They were not only using diagrams within informational text to glean key pieces of information, they were creating their own diagrams based on the research they had done during their study of bridges. The students in this classroom were also using electronic versions of informational text such as Scholastic News and were navigating the publication to find information.

In this area of CCSS requiring the use and understanding of informational text features, four of the five teachers in the study were going beyond the requirements listed in the standards and were allowing the students and the materials to be the "avenue for inquiry" (Maloch, 2008, p. 352). It was evident through observations and interviews that students understood that informational text had a different structure than fictional text with distinct features that required attention and they were able to not only discuss these features but use them in a meaningful way.

Conclusions

Historically the use of informational text for learning had begun around third or fourth grade when students made the switch from learning-to-read to reading-to-learn (Chall, 1983). With the increased pressure associated with standardized testing, the implementation of the new CCSS in 45 out of 50 states, and the realization that life outside school is increasingly information-driven, students are encouraged and even mandated to use informational texts beginning in the earliest grades (Duke, 2004; National Assessment Governing Board, 2007; NGA & CCSSO, 2010; Saul & Dieckman, 2005). Teachers have been reluctant to include this genre of text in the early elementary grades for a number of reasons including their own reading preferences, the belief that students were not equipped to comprehend this genre nor were they interested in informational texts, and the belief that students should learn to read before being introduced to multiple types of text (Caswell & Duke, 1998; Donovan & Smolkin, 2001; Duke et

al., 2003). The findings of this study demonstrated that not only did the students in this study enjoy informational text at a young age, but once their teachers had experienced this level of student engagement, they were encouraged and more likely to utilize this type of text on a regular basis throughout their instruction.

This study confirms that while many current teachers may be more progressive in their thinking and willingness to include informational text in their curriculum, the use of informational text will need to increase rapidly. The teachers in this study were relatively new to this paradigm shift toward informational text and while four out of the five were using informational text on a regular basis throughout their instruction, their classroom libraries still didn't represent the 50/50 balance mandated in CCSS. The teachers in the study reported using informational text anywhere from two to three times a month for instruction all the way up to instructional materials that were nearly 80% informational in second grade. With the exception of the one teacher not embracing CCSS and informational text, the other four have made significant improvements from the teachers in Duke's (2000) study where it was reported only 3.6 minutes each day were spent engaged with informational text. Jeong et al. (2010) reported less than one minute each day in second grade classrooms were spent with informational text. The results of this study indicate a vast improvement from previous research studies in time spent with informational texts in the early elementary classrooms studied.

Duke (2004) proposed four strategies teachers should employ to increase students' comprehension of and use of informational texts. She recommended that teachers (a) increase access to informational texts, (b) increase the amount of time spent engaged in informational texts, (c) explicitly teach comprehension strategies associated with informational text, and (d) create opportunities for authentic use of informational texts. Four out of the five teachers in this

study have accomplished those four recommended tasks. Students in many of the studied classrooms were not only using informational texts more often, their teachers were heavily promoting their use through encouragement, exploration, modeling, and instruction (Maloch, 2008). Comprehension strategies were taught and then applied in a supportive environment, often times in an authentic way through informational writing and research projects.

The research also suggested the use of read-alouds as a means of exposing primary students to various texts and their structures (Reutzel & Cooter, 2012; Walker et al., 2003). Again, four of the five teachers in this study were observed using informational texts as their texts for read-alouds and shared reading activities. Students were observed to be engaged during these activities and evidence of supported modeling as well as examination and exploration of the texts were present in the lessons. The reading was often followed by either independent exploration of the texts or application of the learning through discussion or writing as suggested by the research (Walker et al., 2003).

One of the key components in CCSS is the students' use of informational text to support thinking and writing. Kamil and Lane (1997) found that first grade students of varying academic abilities were capable of not only comprehending informational texts but also using it to support their writing. In this study, students of all academic levels in grades Kindergarten, first, and second grade were observed using informational text to organize, support, and define their writing. They were searching through resources, utilizing anchor charts, and referring to diagrams and posters in order to accurately report their learning through informational writing.

It was shown that teachers in this study were utilizing informational texts to build background knowledge for new content. Duke and Bennett-Armistead (2003) suggested that informational texts might lead to deeper understanding of content by increasing students'

background knowledge. Teachers in this study were using online resources, real photographs, and videos to support students' understanding of difficult vocabulary and new content in both science and social studies. After the informational text was used in this way, students were observed referring back to this information or using the new term or concept in the correct manner.

Finally, this study also validates Guskey's (2002) model of teacher change. He reports that in order for change to be adopted in a teacher's methods, attitudes, and beliefs a change must be observed in their students' learning outcomes. It is not enough to simply explain why something should change. In order for a change to occur teachers must see the value in their own classroom; included within this type of change is the use of new materials and curriculum. The four teachers found to be effectively using increased amounts of informational text witnessed positive outcomes from their students once they attempted this change. These positive outcomes reinforced this new learning for the teachers and gave them the motivation to continue with this change. In this model of teacher change, practices that are found successful are retained and recurring. However, you have to be willing to try out these new practices. The teacher in this study who was not implementing CCSS or the increased use of informational text did not appear to give her students time to experiment with this new way of doing things. She was not open to exploring these possibilities.

The five participants in this study were all in their second year of implementation of CCSS. While they all reported using the ideas and standards in their classroom, it was only truly observed through the increased use of informational texts in four of the classrooms. The four teachers who demonstrated the increased use of informational texts were also seen to support their students' learning in a more collaborative and hands-on way. This finding supports the

application of many available theories regarding teacher change (Sarason, 1996; Smith-Crispin & Gillespie, 2007). Change is typically more difficult to obtain and maintain if a teacher has a significant number of years of experience. However, the larger factor in teacher change seems to be the teachers' states as learners and their self-efficacy. The *entrenched* (suspicious of change) and *withdrawn* (actively opposed to change) teachers compete against change and new ideas regardless the outcome seen by others (Joyce, 1983). All five teachers in this study had been through the mandated implementation of CCSS two years earlier. They were all receiving the same support at the state, district, building, and team level. The difference became apparent in their attitudes regarding the change which manifested itself in the classroom in the area of student support. Students were receiving support through the gradual release of responsibility, increased building of background knowledge through informational text, and scaffolded instruction within their own zones of proximal development in four of the classrooms. Because of this the students felt safe and their learning and development thrived. These four teachers, because of their openness to try new things and support their students, stepped outside their own comfort zone and brought more informational text into their classrooms and into their instruction. The teacher who did not provide these specific supports for students did not make this change with informational text in her classroom. She allowed herself to remain entrenched in her traditional ways of teaching. When the other four teachers allowed themselves to try something new, they found their students actually enjoyed it. The students wanted more and were choosing this type of text on their own. The students' reactions gave these four teachers the push needed to embrace this paradigm shift and to focus more on informational texts in their classrooms.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. One that I addressed earlier in Chapter Three was my established personal relationship with the school and the teachers in this study. While I have attempted to bracket my own bias, it could still have played a role in the analysis of this study. I am only one person, thus this study was interpreted primarily through my eyes. I further attempted to nullify this bias by employing the practice of peer debriefing throughout the data analysis process.

This study was also conducted using only six individuals: five classroom teachers and one instructional facilitator. All six individuals were employed within one elementary school within one school district in the mid-South. The district where this study was conducted is known for being a leader in the state in regard to CCSS implementation. Not all districts may receive the same administrative supports for this paradigm shift as was noted in this study. For these reasons, this study may not be generalizable to other populations.

The school in this study also represents a challenging population one where only eight of the 573 enrolled students do not receive any special services (i.e. special education, free or reduced lunch, gifted and talented, and ESL) from the district or state. The teacher sample at this school is not representative even of the teachers in this school as a whole. The studied teachers came from the pre-high-stakes testing grades within this school. Other grade levels within this school have increased pressure of high stakes testing and performance imposed on them.

One positive limitation present in this study is the fact that each year this school hosts and mentors ten pre-service elementary teacher interns. These interns and their university faculty liaison are present in this building from the first day of school through the beginning of May. The university faculty member spends a great deal of time with the mentor teachers in this

building and conducts weekly mentoring and professional development sessions. The interns

themselves infuse their assigned classrooms with not only another set of hands and eyes, but the

best practices they are exposed to throughout their teacher training. I have had many

conversations with mentor teachers who say they have learned just as much from their intern

about what good teaching is as their intern learns from them. It is a mutually beneficial

relationship.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study raised several exciting possibilities in the area of future research. Most

obvious would be to conduct a similar qualitative study at additional schools to determine if the

results from this study are consistent with the results in another school. A similar qualitative

case study could also be conducted in the next couple of years at grades three and four within

this same school to determine if the increased use of informational text in the early grades does

indeed have an impact on the middle and upper grades in terms of content knowledge and

proficiency of text use itself.

CCSS does not address how to modify the curriculum for students classified as special

education, ELL, or gifted and talented. It would be interesting to look at these specific student

sub-populations within these studied classrooms to determine if this literacy paradigm shift

toward informational text use has any direct impact, positive or negative, upon them.

Another area of long term study might be related to these five teachers using mixed

methodology. It would be intriguing to monitor these same individuals and their classroom

practices through the implementation of the upcoming CCSS assessments and even beyond.

Would these new practices continue or would the more experienced teachers revert back to their

comfortable ways of teaching? How do their experiences and the results compare to schools that may not have as much support at the district level?

It would also be fascinating to continue qualitatively studying the shift toward greater exposure to and frequency of informational texts in the classrooms of experienced versus beginning teachers. Do the research findings from this study as well as previous studies manifest themselves within a larger sample of these two distinct sets of teachers? Which is more indicative of willingness to change within this vein of literacy instruction: years of experience or self-efficacy? Does the change associated with CCSS and more informational text chart the pathways outlined in educational change theory?

Another area of interest was sparked during my conversation with Dana, the less experienced first grade teacher. She had all the right answers and seemed to liken her experience and her excitement back to her teacher training. She even mentioned that the couple of years she taught prior to the implementation of CCSS had been difficult because she was surrounded by a team of teachers who had not been trained in the same practices as her. However, she had remained strong and unwavering in her knowledge and belief regarding the right way to teach. It would be interesting to do a study on the socialization of elementary teachers, specifically from universities with intense teacher training coursework and internships. Would they be more likely to stand firm in their beliefs regarding best practice, even when faced with peer pressure from colleagues to take a different road than an individual who had not experienced a rigorous teacher training program?

Recommendations for Educational Practice

No longer can we deny the educational importance of informational text in early grades. Our world is requiring that students be exposed to a variety of instructional activities that revolve around informational texts. Expanding the use of these texts at even the youngest grades can add a new and exciting dimension to student learning. Students must not only be exposed to these texts but teachers must create authentic opportunities to engage with these texts. Reading and utilizing informational texts has become a life skill and it must begin with our youngest children if students are truly going to survive in our information rich world.

Another recommendation for educational practice is to allow teachers in this era of CCSS to truly implement these standards in their classroom in the way they were written. The writers of CCSS did not create one-size-fits-all units for teachers to take into their classroom and implement with their students. They wrote a set of standards that

> leave room for teachers…to determine how [these] goals should be reached and what additional topics should be addressed…Teachers are thus free to provide students with whatever tools and knowledge their professional judgment and experience identify as most helpful for meeting the goals set out in the Standards (NGA & CCSSO, 2010, p. 4).

When educators are forced to all teach the same units of study, their professional judgment is demeaned in the areas they know will create the best learning environment for their students. It is obvious just by looking at the teachers in this study and their use of additional (not mandated) informational text features that these classroom teachers are the best judges for what their students are ready for and capable of achieving. These prescribed units of study have another potential effect, as said in the interview, of creating teachers without the skills to develop their own meaningful lessons.

This recommendation leads to the final one from this study. In order to truly implement CCSS and the increased use of informational text, schools must address the issue of teacher quality by the creation of more long-term and meaningful professional development sessions, especially for teachers being asked to change the whole implementation of their profession. Faye pointed out in her interview that the new teachers coming out of area teacher preparation programs were not experiencing the difficulties with this transition as the more seasoned teachers in the building. While experienced teachers may not need the intensity of another teacher preparation program to aid them in this transition, they may need the support of a professional learning community (PLC). This model begins with an information presentation in a faculty meeting followed by professional readings and discussion in small professional learning communities. Classroom implementation of the studied strategies would then be tried by one or more members of the PLC who would report back and discuss what worked and what did not work (Penner-Williams, Martinez, Perez, & Gonzales-Worthen, 2012). Potential professional development sessions need to be designed in such a way as to address methods for teachers to expand opportunities for their students to engage in talking, listening, reading, and writing activities around informational texts that are mentally stimulating, easy to access, and provide authentic connections (Duke et al., 2003; Jeong et al., 2010; Professional Standards and Ethics Committee of the International Reading Association, 2010). These experiences may illustrate to teachers how to use informational text strategies with their students in a way that will produce higher levels of student learning and results according to CCSS (Kindall & Penner-Williams, 2013). Significant change in teacher attitudes and beliefs will only likely occur after teachers gain evidence of improvements in their own students' learning and motivation (Guskey, 2002).

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Appendix A

October 11, 2012

MEMORANDUM

TO:	Heather Kindall
	Christian Goering
	Janet Penner-Williams
FROM:	Ro Windwalker
	IRB Coordinator
RE:	New Protocol Approval
IRB Protocol #:	12-10-140

Protocol Title: *Equal Time with Informational Text: A Case Study Exploring the Literacy Paradigm Shift Accompanying the Implementation of Common Core in Several Primary Classrooms*

Review Type: ☒ EXEMPT ☐ EXPEDITED ☐ FULL IRB

Approved Project Period: Start Date: 10/11/2012 Expiration Date: 10/10/2013

Your protocol has been approved by the IRB. Protocols are approved for a maximum period of one year. If you wish to continue the project past the approved project period (see above), you must submit a request, using the form *Continuing Review for IRB Approved Projects*, prior to the expiration date. This form is available from the IRB Coordinator or on the Research Compliance website (http://vpred.uark.edu/210.php). As a courtesy, you will be sent a reminder two months in advance of that date. However, failure to receive a reminder does not negate your obligation to make the request in sufficient time for review and approval.   Federal regulations prohibit retroactive approval of continuation. Failure to receive approval to continue the project prior to the expiration date will result in Termination of the protocol approval. The IRB Coordinator can give you guidance on submission times.

This protocol has been approved for 6 participants. If you wish to make *any* modifications in the approved protocol, including enrolling more than this number, you must seek approval *prior to* implementing those changes.   All modifications should be requested in writing (email is acceptable) and must provide sufficient detail to assess the impact of the change.

If you have questions or need any assistance from the IRB, please contact me at 210 Administration Building, 5-2208, or irb@uark.edu.

Appendix B

Informed Consent for Research Participant

Title: A Case Study Exploring the Literacy Paradigm Shift Accompanying the Implementation of Common Core

Researcher:	*Administrator:*
Heather D. Kindall, PhD Candidate and	Ro Windwalker, Compliance Officer
Clinical Instructor	Research and Sponsored Programs
University of Arkansas	Research Compliance
College of Education and Health Professions	University of Arkansas
Department of Curriculum and Instruction	Admn 210
Childhood and Elementary Education Program	Fayetteville, AR 72701-1201
207 Peabody Hall	479-575-3845
Fayetteville, AR 72701	irb@uark.edu
479-575-2516	

Description: The purpose of this case study will be to discover what teaching strategies are being presented in regards to narrative and informational text in Kindergarten through second-grade classrooms. I will also describe how the newly implemented CCSS may have changed teachers' practices and philosophies regarding the teaching of literacy. Your participation would involve one interview of about 60 minutes in length which will be audio-recorded. The questions will be open-ended, not multiple choice. However, the video will not be released publically, and you will remain anonymous. It will only be used to ensure the accuracy of your quotes for the purpose of this case study. The researcher may request additional interviews for follow-up purposes. Participants will be consulted using member checking to ensure the intent of their statements. In addition, the researcher asks that you provide copies of lesson plans throughout the research period and allow the researcher to observe 3 separate literacy instruction blocks in your classroom. The observations and interview will be scheduled ahead of time.

Risks and Benefits: The benefits include contributing to the understanding of effective literacy instruction in the primary classroom as well as the changes brought about by Common Core. There are no anticipated risks to partaking in this study.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary.

Confidentiality: Your name will not be used in any publication regarding the research of this given study. A pseudonym will be used for the case study and any subsequent publications. All records will be kept confidential to the extent allowed by law and University Policy.

Right to Withdraw: You are free to refuse to participate in this research and to withdraw from this study at any time. Your decision to withdraw will bring no penalty to you.

Informed Consent: **To be completed by the participant***:*

I, _____, have read the description, including the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, the potential risks and benefits, the confidentiality, as well as the option to withdraw from the study at any time, and I believe I understand what is involved. My signature below indicates that I freely agree to participate in this experimental study and that I have received a copy of this agreement from the researcher.

_____   _____

     Signature   Date

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Teacher Interview Questions

General Demographic Information on Class
   a. Male   Female
   b. Caucasian   African American   Hispanic   Marshallese
   c. Other
   d. Special Needs   ELL

2. Tell me about your background and how you got into teaching. What is your educational background?

3. How long have you been teaching and at what grade levels?

4. What is your philosophy about teaching, specifically in the area of literacy? How do you think children learn?

5. Talk to me about the Common Core Standards. Have they changed the ways in which you instruct? Have they caused you to rethink your teaching philosophy? If so, how? (Specifically in regard to literacy.)

6. What is typically included in your literacy block?

7. Did Common Core change the materials you use in your instruction? If so, how?

8. How do you choose texts to use in your instruction?

9. Talk to me about your preference on texts to use for instruction. How many narrative or fictional texts do you use? How many informational texts do you use?

10. How often do you think you use informational texts as your read aloud book? What about as your guided reading texts?

11. How do you think your students respond to nonfiction texts (as compared to fictional texts)?

12. How do you teach informational texts? What structures and features of informational text are important at this grade level? What strategies have you found useful when teaching these?

13. Do you teach informational texts differently than you teach fictional texts? If so, how?

14. How do you encourage students to read informational texts?

Appendix D

Semi-Structured Instructional Facilitator Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your background and how you got into teaching. What is your educational background?

2. How long have you been teaching and at what grade levels?

3. What is your philosophy about teaching, specifically in the area of literacy? How do you think children learn?

4. Talk to me about the Common Core Standards. Have they changed the ways in which teachers should instruct? Have they caused you to rethink your own teaching philosophy? If so, how? (Specifically in regard to literacy.)

5. What type of work are you doing in the classrooms to aid teachers through this shift to Common Core?

6. What is the most common struggle for teachers with these new standards?

7. What has come most easily?

8. Did Common Core change the materials that should be used in instruction? If so, how?

9. In your opinion, how are teachers dealing with the expectation of more informational text embedded in the curriculum?

10. Talk to me about your preference on texts to use for instruction. Prior to Common Core? Now?

11. How do you see teachers using informational texts in the classrooms? What conversations have you witnessed regarding this new expectation?

12. How do you think students respond to nonfiction texts (as compared to fictional texts)?

13. When you do modeled lessons, how do you teach informational texts? What structures and features of informational text are important at grades K-2? What strategies have you found useful when teaching these??

14. Do you encourage teachers to teach informational texts differently than they would teach fictional texts? If so, how?

15. How do you encourage teachers to encourage their students to read informational texts?