Common Core State Standards: Staff Development on Text-Dependent Questions

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Masters of Arts

by

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Common Core State Standards: Staff Development on Text-Dependent Questions
Title of Item

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of Problem

The aim of education should be to teach us rather how to think, than what to think – rather to improve our minds, so as to enable us to think for ourselves, than to load the memory with thoughts of other men

Bill Beattie

It has been touted as the single most comprehensive reform in education. The United States has established a common set of educational expectations adopted by 46 states. In order to prepare students for college and career readiness, the National Governors Association (NGA) and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) released new national curricular standards in math and language arts for primary and secondary schools. These standards, disseminated on June 2, 2010, are called The Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The emphasis of these new standards focuses on rigor in preparing all students for college and careers and the understanding of how to implement these new policies affects districts, site leaders and teachers alike. This realization has set the educational world into motion in determining the most appropriate method for implementation.

There is no right answer on how a school begins to shift their priorities and methods of teaching as they look to the new standards, but it is clear that implementation is imminent. The CCSS are the catalyst to collaboration in order to hasten students' levels of achievement and to teach important skills. The standards are only the blueprints for the new level of rigor and leave the means up to the professionals. According to the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council Of Chief State School Officers (2010), the standards are open to interpretation by educational stakeholders in deciding how the objectives should be met and what

additional subjects should be addressed. Therefore, 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.

Purpose of the Study

The relevancy of the English Language Arts CCSS along with the shift in teaching paradigms has given breadth to this action research. The goals of this project are the creation of staff development that introduces the middle school staff to the new expectations set forth in the CCSS and to look at the use of one reading strategy - understanding text-dependent questions. The objective of the staff development is to increase the middle school staff's awareness of the new shifts in the English language arts (ELA) standards as they pertain not only to English teachers specifically, but to teachers of other content areas.

The standards, according to the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, now stipulate that:

> Literacy standards for grade 6 and above are predicated on teachers of ELA, history/social studies, science, and technical subjects using their content area expertise to help students meet the particular challenges of reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language in their respective fields. (2010)

Furthermore, the staff development will provide teachers with a strategy that assists them in transitioning their lessons to help their students better meet the standards.

Working Definitions

- Educational standards – educational standards help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful by providing clear goals for student

learning (National Governors Association Center For Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

- Common Core State Standards – The Common Core State Standards Initiative is a state-led effort that established a single set of clear educational standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in English language arts and mathematics that states voluntarily adopt (National Governors Association Center For Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).
- College readiness – the level of preparation students need in order to be ready to enroll and succeed without remediation in credit-bearing entry-level coursework at a two- or four-year institution, trade school, or technical school (ACT, Inc., 2004).

Research Questions

The following questions will guide the development of the workshops for my action research:

1. What are the theory and rationale behind establishing the new Common Core State Standards?
2. What are the new expectations and/or changes for English language arts under the new CCSS?
3. What does current research suggest about effective reading pedagogy in relation to the CCSS?
4. How does staff development impact change related to a reformation of standards content?

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Up until 2010 when the CCSS were adopted, each state in America had established their own guidelines for students defining what they should know and be able to do (Rothman, 2012b). Although these educational standards sufficed for their individual state, the difference in

expectations for each state made it academically troublesome when students from one state moved to another; students may miss concepts or repeat standards as a result of differing state standards. Even with states employing their standards, only fifty-one percent of 2005 ACT-tested high school graduates are able to meet the demands of college-level reading (ACT, 2006). So now, with common expectations for all students in the United States, it is hoped that students across the country will graduate from high school prepared for postsecondary education or career readiness.

The Theory and Rationale Behind the Common Core State Standards

State standards originated in the late 1980's as a result of advocates believing that if states specifically enumerated what students should know, learning would improve. States began adopting their own "hybrid" set of standards that were occasionally tied to national documents. Under the administration of President Bill Clinton, states were encouraged to set standards by receiving grants and later, in order to receive federal aid, standards were mandated. All states, excluding Iowa, had adopted standards by the end of the 1990's. Not only had states adopted standards for student learning, but they had created assessments aligned to the standards and established accountability systems that measured school performance on the premise of student attainment of the standards (Rothman, 2012b).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), a law enacted in 2002, began to lend transparency to the variations in state standards. By 2014, the law required all students to reach "proficiency" in reading and math and it was each state's responsibility to create the tests to assess proficiency as well as define the term. Not only were states subjected to giving their own tests, but also according to NCLB, every state must administer the federal testing program National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The disparity in state standards became

apparent as results between the NAEP and the results on state tests indicated wide differences. In 2005, according to Rothman (2012a), eighty-seven percent of 4th graders in Tennessee were proficient on the state test in mathematics, but only twenty percent were proficient on the NAEP. Massachusetts reported that forty percent of 4th graders were proficient on the mathematics state test and forty-one percent were proficient on the NAEP. These discrepancies have caused concerns that certain state standards are deficient in preparing students for postsecondary education or careers.

Even with rigorous standards in place indicating what students need to know to move on to higher education, an analysis of state standards in reading at the high school level suggests a different perspective. According to ACT (2006), twenty-eight of the forty-nine states fully define grade-level standards in reading through the eighth grade. Furthermore, in sixty percent of the states, there is an absence of reading standards for high schools and if they are unstated, then teachers have no specific direction for student goals (ACT, 2006). Inadequate preparation of high school students has been suggested as the origin of a shortfall in postsecondary success for students. Nationwide, the number of students required to enroll in one remedial college course before enrolling in credit earning classes has risen to forty percent (Rothman, 2012a).

The increase in globalization has also driven a need for higher standards. U.S. students need to be prepared to compete with individuals from other countries, making state boundaries less important. By the early 2000s, students from the U.S. were performing below their peers on international assessments, aiding in the justification for higher national standards. When 15-year-old students were tested via the Program for International Assessment (PISA), results of more than 275,000 students from forty-one countries indicated that only about one-third of the U.S. students were performing at satisfactory reading levels, with nine countries ranking

remarkably above the average performance of the U.S. (ACT, 2006). Rothman (2012b) adds that the U.S. students in this age group ranked 21st of twenty-eight industrialized nations on the PISA mathematics assessment. National standards were becoming a necessity.

The effort for common standards began with two organizations of state leaders – the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). A memorandum of understanding was released in April 2009 inquiring which states would agree to collaborate in creating the standards, but would not be obligated to adopt the final product. Quantifiably, forty-eight governors and state education chiefs signed the agreement stating, "they recognized that they could achieve a better product if they pooled their resources, rather than worked separately" (Rothman, 2012b, pg. 59). English language arts and mathematics were the two curricular focal points. Under the new standards, the hope is for students to develop literacy skills specific to these subject areas.

Recognized by Conley (2011), the English language standards for reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language are also applied to history and social studies, science, and technical subjects literacy standards in high school. Conley (2011) further suggests that the intended goals of the standards are to denote fundamental skills and knowledge in a manner that makes it clear for teachers and assessments to focus on. Furthermore, the hope is that the educational level will be raised to a level comparable to the best education systems in the world, such as Finland and Singapore. Creators of the common core standards are optimistic that creating national consistency in expectations will lead to better uses of student learning data, curriculum that is high quality, programs that support teacher preparation aligned with key content standards, and research results that identify what works (Conley, 2011). If educators can

successfully render the standards into new curriculum and instruction, then it is hoped that students will be better prepared for college and careers.

The Expectation and Changes Under the Common Core State Standards

Classroom instruction is going to change due to the new standards. No longer is it solely up to the English teacher to teach literacy skills. The new standards call for elementary students to split their time between informational text and literature, and by high school, students should be reading literature thirty percent and nonfiction seventy percent of the time (Gewertz, 2012b). Social studies will call for teachers to have students read primary- and secondary-source documents in history, while science teachers will have students make sense of diagrams, charts, and technical terminology (Gewertz, 2012a). Alberti (2012/2013) states in her article *Making the Shifts* that, "students need to be grounded in information about the world around them if they are to develop the strong general knowledge and vocabulary they need to be successful readers" (pg. 25). Complaints from employers and college professors have justified the change due to their perceptions of students' inability to analyze or synthesize information, or document arguments (Gewertz, 2012b).

The CCSS delineate a move away from divergent state standards in the areas of English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Porter, McMaken, Hwang, and Yang (2011) assert that the Common Core State Standards Initiative created standards as a state-led effort to provide solidarity on expectations for student skills and knowledge that should be developed in Grades K-12. The standards do not focus on how the curriculum is to be taught; but for both ELA and mathematics, the standards focus explicitly on what the students are to learn. Porter et al. (2011) state that adoption of common standards represent an opportunity to create a national curriculum and would offer several benefits:

1. Shared expectations - a national curriculum would offer consistency.
2. Focus – the Common Core Standards may represent greater focus than state standards typically do.
3. Efficiency – each state does not have to create its own content standards, assessments, and curriculum guides. Efficiency can extend to the business of education, for example, development of curriculum materials, professional development, and preservice teacher education.
4. Quality of assessments – there is a possibility of creating one or two aligned assessments which make it plausible to (a) deliver assessments electronically and (b) make them computer adaptive.

A recent study (Porter et al., 2011) noted the CCSS placed a higher cognitive demand for ELA. Added to this, they report there is a significant emphasis on cognitive analysis in the common core standards over state standards. In fact, twenty percent of the current states' standards emphasize "analysis" while the new common core emphasizes the same content approximately a third of the time. Previous state standards are focused on "perform procedures" and "generate" versus their common core counterpart that stresses "analysis" which puts higher levels of cognitive demand on students. Another shift is less weight on reading comprehension and more on language study (Porter et al., 2011). Language study involves students' study of standard English rules pertaining to grammar and usage when writing and speaking.

Achieve (2012) asserts that the new standards "demonstrate logical progressions through the grades" (pg. 2). This helps teachers to understand that what they are teaching relates to other grades. There are three major literacy shifts under the new common core in ELA: 1) Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction where at least fifty percent of what students read is

informational; 2) Reading and writing is grounded in textual evidence to present careful analysis and 3) Regular practice with text complexity and vocabulary.

Writing instruction will increase with more vigor and will be supported by citations and evidence based on student reading. The motive is to move students away from answering questions that are based on prior knowledge or experience. The new standards prioritize questions that require children to critically read texts (Alberti, 2012/2013). Alberti continues to support that narrative writing in the lower grades helps students gain skill in sequence and detail that will later support the argumentative and informative writing they will be required to write in later grades. Current standards in writing focus on student experience and opinion, which alone, may not prepare them for college and careers.

With the new focus on informational reading and writing that is factually grounded, teachers are concerned there will be little time for literature and the writing genres that unleash students' passions. Proponents for reading nonfiction material argue that it is a powerful equalizer in supporting content knowledge for disadvantaged children, and it is vital in developing the skill set necessary for competitive jobs and college (Gewertz, 2012a). They also continue to support the notion that nonfiction can engage students and that the time spent on this genre does not need to oust creative writing and literature. Reading specialists like Harvey and Goudvis were arguing that educators have wandered too far from analytic, nonfiction reading and writing before the common core were even considered (Strasser & Dobbertin, 2012). Strasser & Dobbertin (2012) continue to emphasize that the standards set reading and writing expectations on other content area teachers outside ELA; therefore, it is suggested that ELA teachers modify the amount of time spent on literary pieces, not discard them completely.

Teachers are encouraged to collaborate with their colleagues in order to help students approach informational texts with critical and active minds.

Effective Reading Pedagogy in Relation to the Common Core Standards

In the Common Core Revised Publishers' Criteria by (Coleman and Pimentel, 2012, pg. 3), the new standards require students to independently read increasingly complex texts as they advance toward career and college readiness. Text difficulty in textbooks, according to Berkin (2012), has been declining since the 1960s. He continues to assert that this has created a significant gap in students' reading material in twelfth grade compared to what is expected from them when they reach college. This gap is having a negative impact on college students and in ACT's report, *Reading Between the Lines* (2006) it states, "students who master the skills necessary to read and understand complex texts are more likely to be college ready than those who cannot" (pg. 16). ACT (2006) postulates that in order to prepare high school students for college, it is necessary for high school courses to strengthen their reading instruction by incorporating complex reading materials. ACT (2006) continues to support the idea that all subjects, not only English and social studies, must challenge students to read and understand complex texts.

In addition, the complexity of college textbooks has become increasingly more complex, and the level of reading within the workplace exceeds the twelfth grade complexity level (Hill, 2011). The readings assigned by college professors are varied with reading requirements that include periodicals, which high school teachers do not assign. Hill (2011) further asserts that the word difficulty of scientific journals and magazines has exponentially increased. This problem is compounded with the fact that textbooks have trended downward in complexity and students in most classrooms are being asked to read less and less.

Not only do the new CCSS call for students to engage in complex texts, but there is also a shift towards curriculum that requires students to read and write more informational text (Maloch &Bomer, 2013). Research has indicated that children should be engulfed in nonfiction in the early years of their education and as stated by (Duke, 2000), "informational texts can play an important role in motivating children to read in the first place " (p. 202). In past years, students have been asked to write creative assignments in elementary school. Later, as secondary students, they are required to meet the demands of writing exposition and arguments. This developmental split is unnatural and is a product of unquestioned curricular habits (Maloch & Bomer, 2013).

Over the past fifteen to twenty years, educational researchers have heightened their stance for more informational text in the elementary classroom (Maloch & Bomer, 2013). The 1980s and 1990s saw educators working towards increasing the amount of literature in elementary school classrooms based on the importance of fictional texts in the classroom. Moss (2008) calls for more inclusion of nonfiction or informational texts citing there may be problems with limiting students' literacy choices to only fiction. Her advocacy for more informational text is supported by the results of the 2001 Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRLS) study of the reading achievement of mostly 10-year-old students in thirty-five nations. These results found that the students from the U.S. demonstrated the largest gap between literary reading and informational reading achievement of any nation studied (Duke, 2010; Mullis, Martin, Gonzalez, & Kennedy, 2003). In the article *Non-Narrative as a Catalyst for Literacy Development*, (Caswell & Duke, 1998) state:

> "Our experience revealed that non-narrative texts provided a rich array of benefits for our students beyond simply preparing them for future encounters with these texts. Specifically,

> through interactions with non-narrative texts, these students became more interested, purposeful, perseverant, knowledgeable, confident, and active in their reading and writing" (p. 109).

They conclude with the overall opinion that informational text is an important impetus for students' overall literacy development. Therefore, classroom libraries should be filled with diverse resources. The inclusion of informational texts in classrooms increases the possibilities of young children learning about the world around them.

Chall and Jacobs (1983) argued over three decades ago that children experience a split in their early school careers transitioning from reading and writing based on fictional experiences to a focus on expository, which contributes to what is referred to as the "fourth-grade slump". During fourth grade, a critical transition occurs for students. Prior to fourth grade, students make a shift from "learning to read" to "reading to learn"; the assumption is that once children reach fluency from reading stories, then they are prepared to use reading as an academic learning tool for content (Sanacore & Palumbo, 2009). They continue to add that some children transition smoothly during fourth grade while others struggle with content area material. Moss (2008) substantiates this by explaining that literacy instruction becomes shadowed due to teachers' concerns with teaching content and (Alexander & Fox, 2011) further indicates that when it comes to literacy and reading instruction, students usually do not receive reading instruction after about the sixth grade.

The "fourth-grade slump" is a problem throughout the United States. Sanacore and Palumbo posit that since children are immersed in mostly narrative text in the primary grades, they struggle in upper elementary when they are expected to comprehend large amounts of expository text and related vocabulary across the curriculum (2009). Furthermore, they indicate

that the fourth-grade slump may come about because children find it difficult to select reading material that interests them. When students read material they find interesting, they read. And the students who read more tend to acquire vocabulary, become more proficient readers, enjoy reading, and continue the perpetual cycle of reading and becoming even better readers (Stanovich, 1986).

The research indicates that there needs to be a serious focus on informational text throughout a child's schooling, thus correlating with the CCSS where eighty percent of postsecondary reading is informational. Also reflecting this sentiment is the 2009 NAEP Framework, which calls for fifty percent of informational passages by 4th grade, fifty-five percent by 8th grade, and seventy percent by the 12th grade (Duke, 2010). Students need to be provided with opportunities to read and write informational texts to improve learning.

Professional Staff Development

Sprinthall, Reiman, and Thies-Sprinthall (1996) claim that teacher development has become an important process of school reform and educational excellence. In the past, staff development has been in the milieu of workshops or seminars. In *Policies That Support Professional Development in an Era of Reform*, (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995) the article identifies professional development as a means of, "providing occasions for teachers to reflect critically on their practice and to fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners" (pg. 597). The shift in pedagogy, as a result of the common core standards, supports the need for professional development. For professional development to be effective, it involves, "teachers both as learners and as teachers" (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995, pg. 598) and teachers will need "updated skills to teach in ways that emphasize the standards' focus" as they begin to address the common core standards (Sawchuk,

2012, pg. 19). Sprinthall et al. (1996) positively avow that the teacher, as an adult learner, is in the process of replacing old views.

Professional development can be powerful in the right school context and (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) proclaim, "job-embedded learning offers the most promising strategy for effective staff development" (p. 273). This assertion is validated by Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995) who believe that professional development activities must, "allow teachers to engage actively in cooperative experiences that are sustained over time and to reflect on the process as well as on the content of what they are learning" (p. 599). Staff development can help teachers rethink old norms as a collective group and collegiality is a professional asset. Teachers will experience transformations as they embrace the changes indicative of the new standards.

Conclusion

The goals of the common core standards are to better prepare students for post-secondary education and careers. The new standards not only apply to ELA, but to history and social studies, science and technical subjects. In order to accomplish this feat, there is a call for students to be immersed in complex text in order to strengthen students reading (ACT, 2006) and informational reading so they are ready for the demands of college and careers. Although the standards stipulate what is to be taught, the authors of the CCSS leave the methods of teaching up to the interpretation of teachers. Conducting staff development that includes collegial discussion and strategies to address the best way to begin implementation is a way for the process to begin.

Chapter Three: Process/Product

Setting

The workshops were conducted in a K-8 school located in a suburban residential city near Los Angeles, California. For confidentiality, the school name and district were changed to pseudonyms.

Ridgewood School is a beautiful campus that is relatively new to the Parkside Unified School District (PUSD). The school's facilities provide state of the art classrooms, libraries, labs, play areas, a multipurpose room and gymnasium for both elementary and middle school students. Although the enrollment is large, the culture parallels a smaller school with meaningful relationships, a strong sense of community, and exemplary teaching with high student achievement.

The K-8 configuration of Ridgewood School serves 1,460 students. The elementary school consists of approximately 975 students in grades K-5 and 485 students in grades 6-8. Although on the same site, the middle school sits off from the elementary buildings allowing for its own identity. Ridgewood's student ethnicity is primarily White (72%) followed by Asian (17%). The school has only minimal students (2%) on free or reduced lunches. Parents of students at Ridgewood are highly educated with thirty-nine percent indicating they are college graduates and forty-nine percent holding graduate level degrees. There are sixty-six fully credentialed teachers on site.

The vision of Ridgewood School is to continue as a California Distinguished School, providing an inclusive education that meets the needs of all students, K-8. The school strives to provide a safe and engaging environment that cultivates the fundamental skills of thinking, learning, problem solving, and communication. Teachers provide a comprehensive, rigorous, yet

balanced and fun educational program that enables all students to grow academically and socially in a positive setting of mutual respect and good citizenship to develop lifelong learners with unlimited potential.

Ridgewood's school wide performance data from the School Accountability Report Card (SARC) published during the 2012-2013 school year shows that a remarkable number of students meet proficiency levels in all content areas.

Standardized Testing and Reporting Results for All Students – Three-Year Comparison

Subject	Percent of Students Scoring at Proficient or Advanced (meeting or exceeding the state standards)								
	School			District			State		
	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12	2009–10	2010–11	2011–12
English-Language Arts	87%	88%	90%	74%	76%	77%	52%	54%	56%
Mathematics	86%	85%	86%	65%	66%	66%	48%	50%	51%
Science	92%	94%	95%	79%	81%	81%	54%	57%	60%
History-Social Science	90%	91%	92%	70%	72%	71%	44%	48%	49%

Note: Scores are not shown when the number of students tested is ten or less, either because the number of students in this category is too small for statistical accuracy or to protect student privacy.

As a result of the focus on common pacing, planning, and assessment, the data reflects the exceptionally strong performance of the students and the strength of instruction at the school site.

As articulated in Chapter One of this paper, the CCSS are imminently close to full implementation; however, determining an appropriate method for effectively executing them has not been established. This ambiguity is up to the teachers to decide how they will help students meet the new goals. As indicated by test scores, Ridgewood's teachers work together to maintain a high level of instruction to ensure student growth and achievement. Now faced with the new standards approaching, I found myself wondering how they would impact instruction.

The English department has taken a look at certain strands of the new standards, but we had yet to put any formal practices into place.

With the increased focus that the CCSS places on reading complex texts, both with regard to literature and informational text, the demand to maintain exceedingly high percentages of student achievement at our site, and the relevancy these standards will have on teachers' instruction has led me to focus my action research project on staff development workshops as a way to look at the beginning steps of implementation on our campus.

After extensive research, I found that a universal thread amongst all content subject areas was text complexity and an increase in informational text students would be required to encounter. I thought this would be a realm for directing my focus for staff development. I approached both the principal and dean of students who thought this would be a good initial starting point for the staff. We decided that I would provide common core training that was broken down into two parts: 1) the shifts in English language arts/literacy under the new common core and 2) a hands-on session to delve into understanding close reading and text-dependent questions. This two-part series would take place on regularly scheduled staff meeting days for the middle school staff.

Development of Staff Sessions

Part I: Introduction to the Literacy Shifts in Content Areas

The goal of this forum was to examine, with the staff, the key instructional shifts required by the CCSS for literacy in the content areas that include: 1) Building knowledge through content-rich nonfiction; 2) Reading, writing and speaking grounded in evidence from text, both in literacy and informational; and 3) Regular practice with complex text and its academic language. I felt that it was vital for the staff to understand how their instructional practices will

change under the new adoption, as content area teachers would now be teaching students to read more complex text.

Part II: Creating and Evaluation Text-Dependent Questions for Close Reading

The second staff development session was designed to provide background information on text-dependent questions and allot time for teachers to actively engage with identifying and creating text-dependent questions.

The workshops covered the following goals and objectives:

Goals:

- Examine key instructional shifts required by the CCSS
- Explore close reading exemplars
- Learn how to support students as they undergo the kind of close reading the CCSS require
- Become familiar with text-dependent questioning

Objectives:

1. Teachers will name CCSS standards with a one – five word phrase.
2. Teachers will read an exemplar piece of text and identify text-dependent questions.
3. Teachers will create a series of text-dependent questions by using a supporting guide.
4. Teachers will evaluate the quality of non-text-dependent and text-dependent questions.

Chapter Four: Implementation

When I originally started this project, I planned on presenting two times and with that notion, created two staff development sessions. As time proceeded on, due to scheduling conflicts on site and time constraints for project completion, it became apparent that I would only be afforded time for one of the workshops that I created. I decided to forgo my first session that provided insight into the ELA shifts under the new standards and would have allowed teachers to

engage in an activity to name the standards. I thus made the decision to give session two covering text-dependent questioning.

Creating and Evaluating Text-Dependent Questions for Close Reading

To develop part two of the staff development unit, I combined information from staff development modules found on the Achieve the Core (www.achievethecore.org) and the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (www.ride.ri.gov) websites. Both of these sources provided necessary tools and information that guided me in forming the information that I felt would most assist me in creating a worthwhile series of tasks for the staff so that at the end of the session, they had tools to begin examining their own practices as they pertain to the CCSS.

Three days prior to the staff development, I met with the principal to discuss final details. At this time, he informed me that during the staff meeting that was allocated for my presentation, a teacher on our staff was being presented an award. This meant that my workshop would begin after the presentation and would most likely happen during non-contractual hours. I immediately sent out an email to all middle school staff informing them that my staff development would be after the originally scheduled hour and if at all possible, to make arrangements to stay longer on that day if they had intentions of attending.

The workshop began around 3:20 p.m. in my classroom. I had a total of five teachers show up which is about one-fourth of the total number of middle school teachers. I began the presentation by thanking them for coming as I realized it was late and we had already attended a forty-minute K-8 staff meeting. I addressed the relevancy of the new standards and how the changes would need us to consider new teaching paradigms and that I wanted us to begin working collaboratively towards implementing them into our lessons. I began the session by

presenting a PowerPoint slide concentrating on the major shifts in the standards for English language arts and literacy while emphasizing that reading strategies would not be exclusive to English teachers anymore, but also the responsibility of content area instructors. Strasser & Dobbertin (2012) state that the standards set reading and writing expectations on other content area teachers outside ELA and I was glad that at least a math and science teacher attended my workshop to hear this.

I proceeded on to the next slide, which gave the parameters of text-dependent questions. The slide focused on four key criteria for text-based questions: 1) asks a question that can only be answered by referring explicitly back to the text being read; 2) does not rely on any particular background information extraneous to the text; 3) does not depend on students having other experiences or knowledge and 4) it interrogates the text itself and what students can extract from what is before them. This is founded on the new standards focusing on questions that necessitate students to critically read texts (Alberti, 2012/2013).

After this, I passed out a sixth grade reading exemplar called "The Making of a Scientist" by Richard Feynman. I wanted to afford the teachers an example of how they would conduct a close reading of a text with their students. As they followed along, I read a small portion of the text modeling fluency and intonation. The strategy of a close reading is to have students reread the text after the teacher reads aloud and because I wanted this workshop to be a real simulation, I had them read the same section silently. After they finished, I asked them several text-based questions to redirect them back into the text as we would our own students. When this was done, I passed out the text passage with the actual directions for teachers, including guiding questions for students.

My original plan at this point was to have teachers break off into small groups to complete the following activity; however, since it was such a small group, we all sat together and proceeded through the next undertaking. Using the teacher directions, they were to locate text-dependent questions from the reading exemplar that matched example descriptors of text-dependent questions. For example, they needed to find examples of questions that 1) explored an argument, idea or key detail; 2) required students to consider (infer) what the text leaves uncertain; 3) required students to analyze paragraphs on a sentence basis or sentences on a word by word basis to determine the role played by individual paragraphs, sentences, phrases or words and 4) investigate how meaning can be altered by changing key words and why an author may have chosen one word over another. The goal was for all of us to begin recognizing the types of questioning we would need to develop for critical reading of texts. The activity opened up an in-depth conversation about identifying and creating different text-dependent questions. We all had difficulty discriminating between questions that cause students to scrutinize phrases or words with questions that investigate how meaning can be altered by changing key words.

I passed out another handout that I had prepared called, *Guide to Creating Text-Dependent Questions.* This provided information on good text-dependent questions and furnished a set of criteria when creating questions. It was now 4:45 p.m. and teachers, although still engaged with interest, needed to leave to meet other obligations. In order to get what I felt to be a more holistic evaluation, I told the participants that I would email them a few questions for them to answer in response to the workshop. They were all more than happy to oblige to my request. I had one science teacher linger afterwards until 5:00 p.m. discussing her enthusiasm about using different pieces of primary and secondary sources to enhance her teaching and provide ways to teach reading strategies to her classes.

Chapter Five: Results

Due to the constant conversation about the CCSS, I was looking forward to presenting the workshop to the middle school staff. The conversations that had taken place prior to this day with the principal and dean of students was motivating as we had all agreed that this was a current issue that was going to impact all of us. When I later found out that my designated hour would be infringed upon by a presentation, I knew that my attendance numbers would significantly drop. The staff, although hardworking and dedicated, tend to not want to stay much after their designated time.

During the workshop, I was pleasantly amazed at the interest teachers were showing towards the topic. They engaged in all activities and the collaboration was thought provoking as we addressed the different types of questioning. What I found most frustrating was that I am not an expert and as I reflect back, I wish that I had more personal experience with what I was presenting to the staff. I also realized within the first twenty minutes that I had planned too much material and that there would need to be follow-up sessions in order to adequately cover the topic of close reading and text-dependent questioning.

The next day I sent out an email to all attendees to get feedback on the workshop. Although I was leery about the results because of the lack of attendees, the reactions quickly swept away my apprehensions. Three teacher's responses came back very quickly. The delivered questions and ensuing responses from teacher S (math), teacher B (science) and teacher M (English) are as follows:

What were you expecting from the staff development workshop?

Teacher S stated:

"Before arriving, I was expecting more of the same about common core. My math common core classes talked about the background of common core and what the students will be doing differently. We did not collaborate, create, or discuss future goals as much as dissecting the manual."

Teacher B said:

"As a science teacher, I was expecting exposure to strategies that I can begin utilizing in order to incorporate common core standards into my science instruction."

Teacher M replied:

"I expected that we would receive some information on what the new common core standards mean or expect in terms of close reading of the text. I was hoping we would look at a piece of informational text."

What did you learn or what knowledge was gained?

Teacher S observed:

"After meeting with Cheryl and the group, I was able to understand more not only about how the student will behave and learn differently, but also how I will be able to facilitate that learning."

Teacher B remarked:

"I realized that I can integrate relevant scientific readings into my curriculum that could allow students to gain more insight into the concepts that I am teaching. In this way I can guide my students to more depth of understanding, rather than just surface understanding."

Teacher M responded:

"The science text that Cheryl presented was a memoir that prompted a discussion of how informational text can be interesting and enrich the curriculum. It was an unexpected, and

appreciated approach. The text-based questions were interesting, as was the discussion of what types of questions they were. It wasn't about the specific answer as much as it was talking about how to construct questions in order to illicit, deep textually based responses".

What did you take away from the workshop?

Teacher S replied:

"The next day, after the workshop, instead of reading the next science chapter together and me stopping to talk and add to the text, I did things a lot differently. I did introduce the section on earthquake safety similar to before, but then I passed out whiteboards and had the students read a page or section, and then asked them critical questions. Sometimes they wrote the answers down while other times, they raised their hands to answer. I gave them more time to ponder the answers and received quite a bit more feedback on their thinking. So many more kids were thinking and participating than normal! The most valuable part of Cheryl's session was the discussion time to discuss 1) classroom application and 2) how the difference in teaching can lead to greater connections to the text and the ability for students to learn."

Teacher B replied:

"In science, employing this new strategy of introducing an exemplar piece prior to reading the text or research activity, could make concepts more "alive" for my students. I am excited to try text-dependent questioning in my class."

Teacher M added:

"I have begun to examine the questions in the textbook and this will help me reshape my own prompts so students have to provide specific evidence to support their responses."

The final question that I asked was if the participants had any further questions for me after having time to think about the time we spent collaborating text-dependent questions. A resounding response was that they would appreciate the opportunity to participate in another staff development to effectively learn how to create text-dependent questions. This sentiment corresponds to the research completed by (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995) asserting that professional development is a means of allowing teachers to reflect critically on their practice and to fashion new knowledge about pedagogy.

Chapter Six: Conclusions/Next Steps

Due to the fact that the CCSS are new and full implementation has not yet begun, many schools are left to navigate their course of action. After spending many hours researching and perusing materials for staff development, my main goal was to initiate a starting point for our staff. The new standards have heightened my awareness as to the level of critical thinking we need to begin engulfing our learners in. It was also my full intention to take the leadership role at our site to begin delving into the new standards so that our instructional program continues with strength and fidelity as we assimilate the expectations of the new standards into our teaching. The workshop was a success and sets the stage for further collaboration on teaching strategies amongst all content teachers. To have teachers respond that they are beginning to use the strategy covered in the workshop is greatly reaffirming and teachers have stated to the principal that they would like more sessions to continue moving forward with this topic. I will be giving this workshop again for teachers who were unable to attend the first time as well as for other grade levels.

In retrospect, to further the success of this project, the scheduling needed to be set at the beginning of the academic school year for full delivery of all information and increased numbers

of participants. Having set times denoted, staff members would have been well aware of when the sessions were to take place. The other problem that I encountered was not knowing how much time would be needed to cover all the information. Had the workshops started earlier in the year, I would have been able to conduct the two sessions that I originally planned for and added the possibility of implementing more. Finally, one of my biggest struggles was taking on something new and trying to decipher the topic enough to begin sharing with my colleagues. For this reason, I probably did not talk enough about the workshops to incite interest. Now that I received such positive feedback, I will make sure that the staff is aware well in advance about the workshops, so that they may attend.

To ensure that Ridgewood School continues to work towards implementing the CCSS, I suggest the following be considered to facilitate a deeper understanding of close reading and text-dependent questioning. First, I believe it is important for teachers to fully understand what is being asked of them to implement the CCSS, especially by content area teachers. I recommend that the first session that I developed be shown. The content would allow for an overview of the three key instructional shifts required under the CCSS, the research and rationale for each shift, and their impact on instruction in content area classrooms. After a PowerPoint presentation, a roundtable conversation would provide for an opportunity to reflect upon each of the key shifts and its implications for instruction. Teachers, in a culminating activity, could look closely at the literacy standards in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects via a hands-on project that guides them through naming the standards with a one – five word phrase.

Next, continuation of the seminar on learning about text-based question needs to take place where participants learn how to create a series of text-dependent questions, based on an exemplar piece, using the *Guide for Creating Text-Dependent Questions* handout that I presented during

the delivered session. This collaborative session would then allow the participants to evaluate their questions and then share their thoughts on the process, while giving each other feedback. To further the experience, another session should be devoted to taking current grade level informational text, either by grade level groups, interdisciplinary teams, or content teams that participants find worthy of a close read. Again, using the *Guide for Creating Text-Dependent Questions*, groups would craft questions based on the criteria referenced from the guide. After, teachers could engage in a conversation about how students might respond to this type of questioning and if this type of questioning changes the way a student interacts with the text. Teachers could then return to the classroom to implement these questions with students.

Furthermore, I suggest that teachers take daily notes to record best practices and challenges while implementing the tasks in addition to collecting student work. After executing the tasks, participants can share student work and anecdotal experiences with colleagues. This will allow for teachers to contribute to the conversation of best practices and challenges while implementing the tasks.

The CCSS are only the blueprints in an attempt to hasten students' levels of achievement and teach important skills. The standards do not come with an implementation manual, leaving it up to the professionals to undertake the task of best teaching strategies. This gave precedent to the vision of this project and I believe that I have taken a significant step in that direction.

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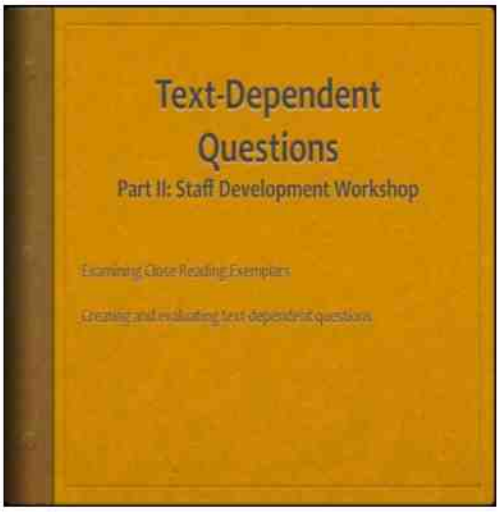
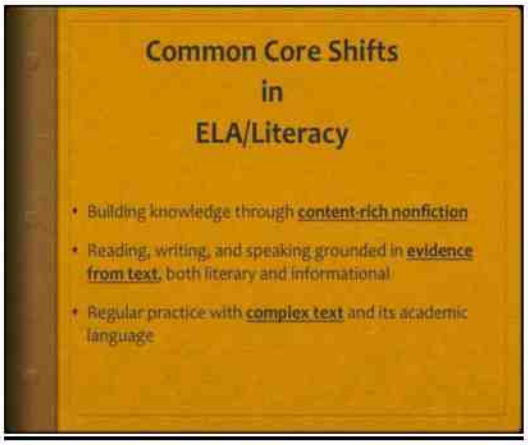
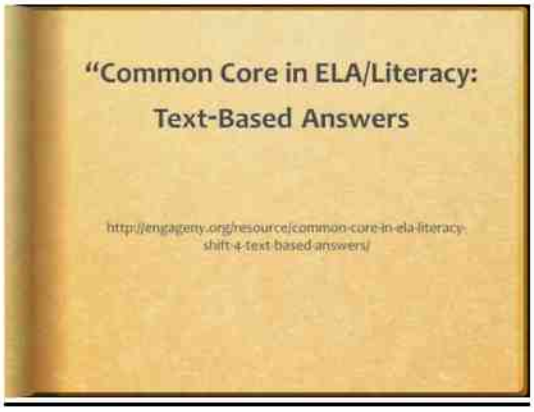
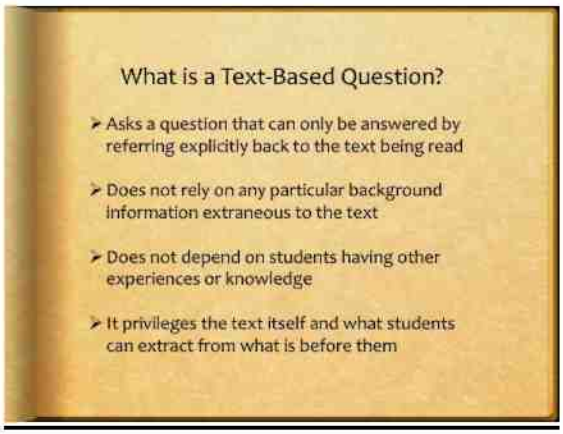
Appendix

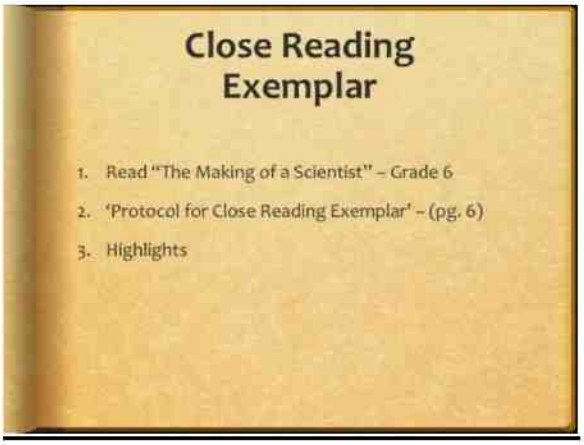
Below are the PowerPoint slides that were presented during the staff development workshop:

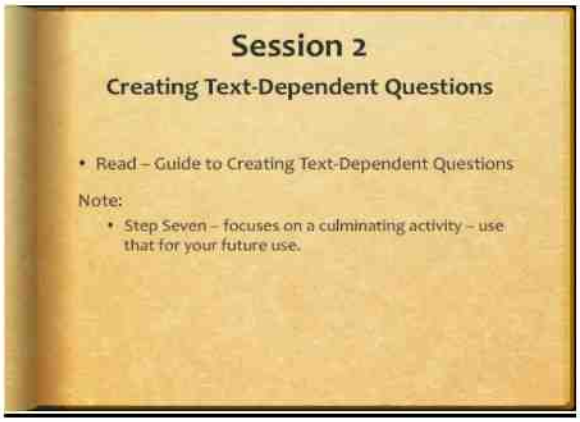







What is a Text-Based Question?
Asks a question that can only be answered by referring explicitly back to the text being read
Does not rely on any particular background information extraneous to the text
Does not depend on students having other experiences or knowledge
It privileges the text itself and what students can extract from what is before them


Close Reading Exemplar
1. Read "The Making of a Scientist" – Grade 6
2. 'Protocol for Close Reading Exemplar' – (pg. 6)
3. Highlights


Session 2
Creating Text-Dependent Questions
• Read – Guide to Creating Text-Dependent Questions
Note:
• Step Seven – focuses on a culminating activity – use that for your future use.