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Examining Teachers' Beliefs about the Value of the Common Core English Language Arts Standards

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to develop and administer a survey that examines teachers' beliefs about the value of the Common Core English Language Arts (ELA) standards, the feasibility of implementing the standards, and the effects these standards have on teachers' instructional practices and their perceptions of student outcomes.

Research Questions:

- 1) To what extent has the transition to Common Core ELA standards affected teachers' current use of instructional strategies in literacy?
- 2) Do teachers believe implementation of Common Core ELA standards has been beneficial or detrimental to student outcomes in literacy?
- 3) Do teachers believe that implementation of Common Core ELA standards is feasible given the support and transition assistance they received from their school district and the changes in rigor made to previous standards?
- 4) Do teachers feel prepared to integrate digital technology into their instruction in accordance with the Common Core ELA standards?

Perspectives

In recent years, shifts in the U.S. education system have occurred, including a stronger focus on preparing all students to be college and career ready and the adoption of K-12 Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by the majority of states. The CCSS provide common and rigorous expectations in Mathematics and English Language Arts that will require a transformation in instructional practices to implement for the benefit of every student in the nation (U.S. Education Delivery Institute, 2012). To date, forty-six states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have adopted the CCSS. In spring of 2012, Kentucky became the first state to assess students using the new standards. Seven states will join Kentucky in the full implementation of the CCSS in 2013 followed by an additional 20 states in 2014 and the remaining participating states by 2016 (Council of Chief State School Officers, n.d.).

As the CCSS are gradually implemented across the country, most states remain in the training stage with their teachers. Teachers in early implementation states have found the transition to be challenging due to the broad nature of the standards and the lack of directions about how to teach students to meet the standards (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). Successful implementation of the CCSS will require large amounts of time and funding to successfully achieve this complex task. Relationships between state level policy makers and classroom practices will have to be strengthened in a time when resources are scarce for many states. In-depth and ongoing professional development will be vital in providing teachers with the tools and knowledge to carry-out quality implementation plans (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012).

One advantage of a small number of states leading the way in implementation of the CCSS is that the states that follow can learn from the successes and failures of the leading states.

Although state leaders are an important voice for improvements that need to be made, it is equally important to give teachers a voice to speak for themselves and for the students for which the standards were created. The current study provides teachers with an avenue to provide feedback, share concerns, and offer insights about the implementation of the CCSS. The results of this study will be used to provide suggestions for appropriate professional development on the implementation of the CCSS and suggestions for policy on the CCSS.

Conceptual Framework

Beginning in the late 1960's, behavior analysts became interested in the social perception or acceptability of treatment approaches. Kazdin (1977) and Wolf (1978) posited that it is not enough to know if procedures are effective; they must also be deemed socially appropriate and acceptable by the individuals who are implementing them. Throughout the 1980's Kazdin and others continued research on treatment acceptability for a wide range of procedures (Miltenberger, 1990). Much of the current research is targeted toward investigating behavioral interventions, but less is known about the acceptability of academic interventions (Rowe, 2012).

Researchers have described several factors that may impact treatment implementation and acceptability, including the complexity of the intervention, the teacher's ability to implement given his or her current resources, the teacher's perception of the value and feasibility of implementation, and the teacher's understanding of the intervention (Mautone et al., 2009). Thus, the survey designed for the current study was based on previous research on the acceptability of interventions in education. Because all of the previously described factors are critical in evaluating the success of the design and implementation of the Common Core ELA standards, data from the current study will be analyzed with the literature on treatment acceptability as a lens, with the goal of adding to the literature on the acceptability of interventions in education.

Methods & Data Sources

This study used online survey research methods to examine teachers' beliefs about their preparedness to implement the Common Core ELA standards and the resulting impact on their instructional practices and outcomes. The sample consisted of reading and language arts teachers from each of the eight states (i.e., Kentucky, Minnesota, Michigan, Maine, Delaware, North Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi) that had fully implemented the CCSS by spring 2013. To recruit participants, school districts were randomly selected from each state and a letter was sent to district superintendents to acquire permission to distribute the survey to teachers. Once permission was acquired, school principals in the district distributed the survey link to teachers through email. An online survey methodology was selected because it best suited the purposes of this study. That is, surveys can be easily distributed to a large population and can be self-administered.

The survey was designed to measure the following six constructs related to the implementation of the CCSS: (1) Instructional Practices- designed to inquire about teachers' beliefs about the effects of the common core ELA standards on their instructional practices; (2) Student Outcomes- designed to inquire about teachers' beliefs about the effects of CC ELA standards on student outcomes; (3) Feasibility- designed to inquire about teachers' beliefs about the feasibility

of implementing the common core ELA standards; (4) Digital Technology- designed to inquire about teachers' beliefs about their preparedness to integrate digital technology as a result of transitioning to the common core ELA standards; (5) Barriers- designed to inquire about teachers' beliefs about barriers to implementing the common core ELA standards; and (6) Supports- designed to inquire about teachers' beliefs about the support they have received in order to implement the common core ELA standards.

The development and validation of the online survey followed authoritative procedures and recommendations in the literature on survey development (Dillman, 2007; Rea and Parker, 2005). First, content validity (Litwin, 1995) was assessed using an expert panel of reviewers. The survey was revised based on feedback from the expert panel and subsequently piloted with a focus group of teachers who have similar characteristics as the teachers in the target population. Changes were again made based on feedback and responses from the pilot survey. Once data collection is complete, items will be factor analyzed and the survey will be revised as necessary prior to administering the final survey.

Results

Data collection is underway and will be completed in April, 2013 and analyzed prior to the LRA conference. Likert scale items will be analyzed using descriptive techniques, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and path analysis to look for patterns and differences among teachers based on factors such as levels of support, amount of professional development received, teachers' perceptions of their preparedness, the extent to which teachers have adjusted instruction due to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and their perceptions of the barriers to implementing the CCSS. Open-ended items will be analyzed using a content-analysis approach (Neuendorf, 2002) with an emergent coding scheme.

Importance of the Study

The knowledge gained from this study will provide helpful information for planning professional development activities designed to enhance teachers' ability and behavior in promoting Common Core ELA standards and to inform policy makers in states who have not yet fully implemented the standards.

Interest to the Audience

This study contributes to the discussion on reform in literacy education, a primary focus of this year's conference. The Common Core is transforming the way students access literacy and we must ensure teachers are prepared to support them. The results of the study will help identify which Common Core standards pose the most challenge to teachers and will therefore inform those working in teacher education and professional development settings. The results will also help identify effective implementation practices, which could inform future research on literacy reform efforts.

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