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2016

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

High School Social Studies and the Common Core:

An Action Research Project

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

by

Nicholas Charles Heath

2016



## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

High School Social Studies and the Common Core:

An Action Research Project

by

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Professor Eugene Tucker, Co-Chair

This qualitative action research project involved a group of 17 social studies teachers in four course subjects: world history, U.S. history, government, and economics, developing a set of literacy-enhancing lessons to better understand how the Common Core will impact their instruction from now on. This social studies department, like many others in the state, has not had any formal training in how the Common Core's emphasis on literacy skills will work in their classes. Due to this lack of training, in-house action research was selected as the best approach to their professional development. Building off the collective knowledge of each other, the teachers went through a cycle of inquiry designed to identify a problem, model possible solutions or lessons, intervene in their classrooms with Common Core-aligned lessons, and evaluate how it all worked out. Data were collected via survey, documentation,

observation, and interview. Evidence was triangulated between collection methods to identify how well the teachers understood the role of the Common Core in their own lessons, what factors were promoting that understanding, and what factors were hindering that understanding. In this study, it was found that the teachers still do not fully understand how to create lessons well aligned to the expectations of the Common Core. Their strong collaborative culture, accountability to each other, and motivation to change are helping them, however. The teachers still need to be able to overcome a lack of knowledge about the Common Core, a lack of resources to build that knowledge, and a lack of time to do this work. This action research project did, though, get them set on a path towards successful adoption of Common Core-aligned pedagogy.

The dissertation of Nicholas Charles Heath is approved.

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2016

DEDICATION

*To my wife, Amy*

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Gene Tucker for guiding me through this entire process from day one. His support and assistance made this all possible. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Cooper, Dr. Wilms, and Dr. McDonough for their support. The ELP faculty, especially Dr. Rose and Dr. Durkin, played an integral role in my development throughout the course of this program and I am grateful for what all of the faculty, including Dr. Kratzer, have done for me during this time. Thank you.

I would not have made it without the support I received from my family and fellow members of ELP Cohort 21. I will forever appreciate your roles in helping me accomplish this degree. A million thanks to all of you.

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## CHAPTER 1

The introduction of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has changed the expectations for content-area teachers to provide a deeper focus on literacy. Specifically, history-social science (henceforth social studies) teachers are now expected to reevaluate how they structure their curriculum and develop their lessons to meet these new expectations (California State Board of Education, 2013). A problem for social studies teachers in this transition to the CCSS is that they have not had the same type of guidance as English and math teachers when it comes to standards, instructional materials, practice assessments, and professional development. New social studies content standards in the State of California have not yet been introduced and the CCSS only lay out how social studies teachers can support the reading, writing, and communication goals of the Common Core. Furthermore, resources such as new textbooks are not yet available.

The California Department of Education (CDE) has published a timeline of implementation for the CCSS. It is divided into three phases: awareness, transition, and implementation. A professional development plan is included in this timeline, yet it was left up to the counties and Local Education Agencies (LEA), or districts, to carry out (California Department of Education, 2014a). Even if every LEA trained all of their teachers in the new CCSS, it does not mean that their programs would necessarily be up to the task (Susan Jenkins & Agamba, 2013).

There are social studies departments that have had no professional development whatsoever in the implementation of the CCSS. In a poll conducted by Education Week, only 46% of the respondents indicated that they had been trained in implementing the CCSS across

all subject areas. A specific question about social studies was not even asked (EWRC, 2014).

New accountability measures for California's schools will incorporate the Smarter Balanced assessment<sup>1</sup>, which was first administered in the 2014-15 school year. While social studies content is not directly tested, a school's assessment scores do reflect student competencies in areas for which social studies teachers have some responsibility. The greatest expectation at this point for social studies teachers is to support students' literacy in their content area. Literacy in this sense suggests both students' ability to understand a subject like history, and to be able to digest any informational text at a high analytical level (California State Board of Education, 2013).

The move towards more intense literacy instruction is a break with the recent past. The California Standards Test (CST), which was tied to previous state standards and accountability measures, was much more focused on the ability of students to recall a large number of facts. While the change to a curriculum emphasizing higher-order thinking may prove beneficial, social studies teachers are navigating the shift without a steady compass (Gilles, Wang, Smith, & Johnson, 2013; Susan Jenkins & Agamba, 2013). This qualitative action research study documented the process of developing literacy-enhanced lessons for students in one school.

The unusual circumstances of having social studies teachers being expected to implement literacy instruction without professional development (Jenkins & Agamba, 2013) presented several challenges. First, teachers had to overcome the sense of uncertainty that can

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<sup>1</sup> The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) is one of two organizations that have developed assessments for states to use to measure student learning under the Common Core. California is a member of SBAC. The other organization is the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

negatively impact their progress (Melville & Pilot, 2014). Second, teachers had to be able to work together to collaborate on a plan for instruction without much guidance (Dougherty Stahl, 2015; Young, 2006). Third, the teachers had to adopt new routines (Feldman & Pentland, 2003) and remain committed to improving literacy instruction under the CCSS.

### **Site Description**

This study was conducted at a typical suburban high school in southern California. The student demographics mirror that of the state at large in most respects though the school community has a higher median income. Also, the school's most recent Academic Performance Index (API) score and the social studies department's most recent CST scores were above the state's averages<sup>2</sup> (Appendix A). The social studies department includes 17 teachers, 16 of whom teach the core subjects that were a part of this study. I was one of the core-subject teachers and took on the role of participant-observer in this action research project (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

Teachers of most subjects at the school are organized in course teams each with a team leader. In a typical academic year, the teams will meet for two-hour blocks three times and in one-hour blocks about five times. These teams have developed a culture of collaborating on common assessments, sharing strategies, and setting achievement goals. However, most of this work was done under the old standards and CST. Now the teams must work on addressing the CCSS without losing the trust that was built earlier.

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<sup>2</sup> The Academic Performance Index was an accountability score assigned to public schools in California. A large part of the API was composed of students' performance on the California Standards Tests (CST).

## **Purpose of the Study**

Teachers constantly have to evolve their pedagogy, but the introduction of the CCSS has set in motion a nationwide scramble to make sense of the new emphasis on developing college and career-ready students (Steadman & Evans, 2013). The staggered introduction of the standards by subject further complicates the effort because a new social studies framework to guide teachers is only now in development at the time of this writing (California Department of Education, 2014b). This study followed the social studies department through one action research cycle as the teachers worked on creating a literacy-oriented curriculum to satisfy the expectations of the CCSS within their previously established professional learning communities (Dougherty Stahl, 2015).

Two key elements made up this study. First, since this was a collaborative effort by professional teachers to create change in their practice, an analysis of their professional development was necessary (Horn & Little, 2010). The teachers are going through a change in the way they teach and understanding how they move through that process is important (Lewin, 1946). Also, this change in practice involved adults learning new tasks (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Knowles, 1980) so adult learning also presented an area to analyze.

Second, the entire project concerned literacy and it was important to analyze this construct both in general terms and how it fit into the context of the department studied (Bennett, 2011). These two elements were brought together under the umbrella of socio-cultural theory and constructivism (Vygotskiï, 1978). A common thread tied the teachers and the students in this social studies department: sense-making. The teachers had to come together within their course team “cultures” to develop a common understanding of what



literacy instruction will look like for them (Carney & Indrisano, 2013; Lambert, 1995; Vygotskiĭ, 1978). Properly developed literacy instruction will require the students to come together in their classroom “cultures” to make sense of the information they need to process (Cuthrell & Yates, 2007; Vygotskiĭ, 1978). In fact, the CCSS require that students work collaboratively in this manner (California State Board of Education, 2013).

The following research questions guided the search for how these two elements of professional development and literacy manifest themselves in the study:

1. What is the process of developing a set of Common Core State Standards literacy lessons in a social studies department?
  - A. How do teachers respond (motivated, discouraged, etc.) to the need to incorporate more literacy instruction in their classes?
  - B. How do teachers collectively select the literacy strategies they will incorporate into social studies content courses?
  - C. To what degree, if any, do teachers report that the department’s collaboration meetings helped them improve their literacy instruction?
  - D. What forces are contributing to their understanding of the Common Core’s role in social studies and what forces are hindering their understanding?

My goal in conducting this study was to understand how teachers deal with a change in expectations without formal professional development. Specifically, this meant identifying the factors promoting the teachers’ understanding of the change and the factors hindering that understanding. This action research project was designed to help a social studies department build a set of literacy lessons aligned with the CCSS. In the course of their work, the teachers

had to deal with the uncertainty that comes with change, come to consensus on a course of action, and hold each other accountable for committing to the strategies.

### **Research Design**

This study was a qualitative action research project. Action research involves cycles in which interventions are developed, implemented, and reviewed (Lewin, 1946). This method is well suited to the department's work in developing literacy-enhancing lessons. The use of action research aligned with the collaborative nature of developing a lessons in-house (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Furthermore, a qualitative approach provided the ways in which teachers came to an understanding of how literacy instruction can be imbedded in the social studies curriculum. This study analyzed the action research cycle as the course teams created lessons to improve students' literacy skills. That cycling process for continuous improvement will continue, however, into the future.

### **Research Methods**

The first step in the research process was to create an action research team that guided the cycles in the 2015-16 school year. The team was comprised of the department chair, one assistant principal and one district administrator, the course team leaders, and myself. Each of the four core course teams (world history, U.S. history, government, and economics) had a course team leader. I was the course team leader for world history. These teachers were already responsible for guiding the teams and they were very familiar with the structure of this project.

The course teams had their first meeting in October of 2015. The purpose of the first meeting was to review the expectations of the CCSS, the goals of the study, some literature on literacy, and model lessons used in other schools. This was the diagnostic stage of the action research cycle. It also presented the first look at how teachers make sense of literacy within their context and how that set the path towards professional change. Documents from the meetings were analyzed along with survey data on how the teachers thought about implementing literacy instruction.

The planning action stage followed over the next month. At this stage, the teachers worked in their course teams to create actual lessons to implement. These lessons became the intervention for the action research project. A window of about eight weeks was provided to allow teachers time to fit the lessons into their unit plans without disruption. Evidence of how their plans were implemented was analyzed through cross-checking documents from the meetings with in-depth interviews and teacher reflection forms.

The review stage followed the intervention at the beginning of the second semester. The teachers discussed, in their course team meetings, how the literacy lessons worked, sharing both successes and obstacles. The teachers used their own data on student achievement to analyze how the lessons worked. The data collected for the study included pre and post surveys of each teacher in the department, interviews of randomly selected teachers in each course team, and documentation and observation of the work they did within their course teams.

The team used the findings learned in the action research cycle to inform the next plan of action for next year's round of literacy instruction implementation. Though this next cycle will be guided by the findings in this study, it was not a part of it.

## **Public Engagement**

I delivered my findings to the teachers, an assistant principal, and three district representatives at a department meeting and then again to the school's administration several days later. The presentation laid out which factors present in the study were contributing to the teachers' ability to implement literacy instruction and which forces were hindering them. I also presented suggestions for how to build increased literacy instruction in the following year. I did not go into too much depth about details on how the action research project and collaboration progressed. My focus was identifying the major obstacles we need to address.

## CHAPTER 2

The introduction of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has changed the expectations content-area teachers have for delivering instruction. A deeper focus on literacy and the use of informational texts is forcing content-area teachers, such as social studies teachers, to reevaluate how they structure their curriculum and develop their lessons to meet these new expectations. A problem for social studies teachers exists as a result of this transition to the CCSS as they have not had the same type of guidance as English and math teachers. New social studies content standards in the state of California have not been introduced; the CCSS only lay out how social studies teachers can support the reading, writing, and communication goals in English-language arts; and resources such as new textbooks are not yet available. On top of these shortfalls is the fact that the social studies department in this study has had no professional development whatsoever in the implementation of the CCSS.

### **Constructs of the Study**

Several theoretical frameworks, or models, guided this study. Change theory and adult learning theory played a central role, as these social studies teachers had to learn new strategies. I explored models of professional development, as well as organizational change. These teachers are taking on transformative change but without much in the way of external guidance or even clear direction from administration. At the level of instruction, this social studies department has to wade through different schools of thought on literacy. Perspectives vary from simple reading and writing instruction to a holistic comprehension of a subject (in this case social studies) that may or may not include different critical perspectives. Each of

these frameworks impacted the direction of this study and, more importantly, the CCSS-oriented literacy lessons developed within this social studies department.

Empirical research from both literacy and professional collaboration set the foundation for this study. Different perspectives on literacy need to be parsed out, as one element of this study was to understand what the specific teachers in this social studies department believe literacy to be. If this department is to continue to implement new strategies to improve literacy instruction, then a common understanding of literacy is essential. Furthermore, the creation of a common literacy lessons involves a set of social dynamics working amongst the teachers of the department (Gilles et al., 2013). Understanding the process these teachers employed in collaborating on a new way of teaching without the usual degree of guidance from district and state officials did make up the largest share of this study.

### *Change*

Lewin's (1947) force-field theory of change laid out a basic understanding of the forces for and against change in an organization. When members of a group want to change something within their organization they need to find a way to promote the forces that will support the change while limiting the forces working against it. Lewin's three-step theory of change provides a foundation for those undergoing a large shift in practice on the scale of the CCSS. This theory has been widely used in business management. First, in order to create change, the organization needs to "unfreeze" (Lewin, 1947). This entails the recognition of a problem, willingness to do something about it, and the creation of a plan of action.

"Unfreezing" within the context of this action research project occurred during the pre-step, diagnosing, and planning action steps of the action research cycle.

Once the social studies department opened up to the need for change, the intervention was ready to take place. This is the “change” phase of the model (Lewin, 1947). In this particular study, the department members taught specific literacy strategies to their students, within the context of their content, that are better aligned with the CCSS. The department’s focus on literacy is intended to last beyond the intervention, or taking action step of the cycle. To make this change lasting, Lewin’s (1947) third stage, typically referred to as “refreezing”, will be necessary. The teachers in this department were not to that point by study’s end.

One way to unfreeze an organization is to let the employees help develop the change (Georgalis, Samaratunge, Kimberley, & Lu, 2015). Collaborative models of change gain buy-in from participants as opposed to change imposed by higher-level management. In fact, the idea that those making the change should be involved has been promoted in education for 40 years. Stenhouse (1975) wrote that teachers need to be the ones developing what they teach and that using action research to discern what is working and what is not is useful. Furthermore, this model should be the basis for teachers’ professional development.

### *Teacher Learning*

Professional development involves learning a new set of skills to incorporate in the workplace. For teachers, this involves learning new ways of teaching, developing their pedagogy, and enhancing their instruction and assessment. Adults need to be instructed differently from children (Knowles, 1980). Knowles (1980) developed the concept of andragogy to distinguish adult learning from pedagogy. Adults are more self-directed and problem-oriented than children. They do not have to depend on a teacher the way a child

does because they have a vast base of experience that informs their learning (Forrest & Peterson, 2006; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

Competing theories of how adults acquire new learning fill the literature on professional development. Cognitivists believe that there is an objective reality that individuals can make sense of through the development of mental models, or schema (Bandura, 1986). Situated cognition is another theory that places learning within the context of social interaction. Individuals are assimilated into the culture of the group and take on its beliefs (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989).

Constructivism has its roots in the work of Vygotskiï (1978). Vygotskiï was a Soviet psychologist who worked on knowledge acquisition in the 1920-30's. His ideas about what he termed the "zone of proximal development" became influential in the West after his book *Mind in Society* was published in the United States in 1978 (Daniels, 2005). The zone of proximal development is basically the area between what an individual can do by themselves and what they can do with competent guidance. It is in that area of knowledge that a learner requires assistance from someone like a teacher (or in this study a collaborative group of professionals) in order to fully comprehend a new concept (Vygotskiï, 1978). The term scaffolding was developed to explain how a teacher can support a student's learning (Bruner, 1960). In this study, the teachers sharing their expertise in various aspects of literacy instruction served as the major form of scaffolding.

Central to constructivist thought is the belief that the learner constructs knowledge as new information is compared with previous learning. This means that what people know is not an exact model of reality, but a personal construction of their worldview (Romberg & Carpenter, 1986). The construction of knowledge was an integral part of how the teachers in



this action research project made sense of the CCSS and how they can enhance their pedagogy to meet these new expectations. They have to make their lessons fit their style.

Reflective learning theory as articulated by Jarvis (1992, 2003, 2006) helps frame how this study followed the teachers through their early changes in practice. Adults are not empty vessels ready to be filled with knowledge. They come to any new learning with a set of experiences and a developed worldview that color how they perceive new information. New information has to be processed within the context of what the adult learner already knows (Jarvis, 1992, 2003). There is a threat that adults may turn away from information that does not fit with their views (Jarvis, 1992); therefore new learning should be structured to build on what the adult learner already knows (Jarvis, 2002).

Reflective learning is not the only adult learning theory. Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991) helps explain the process that I, the principal researcher, went through when analyzing my action research project. Transformative learning involves phases similar to those taken in action research (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). As part of this process, I had to reflect on how this action research project could actually improve instruction under the new CCSS. Next, I needed to reflect on how the action research cycle was progressing and determine if I needed to make any course corrections. Finally, I had to accept how my new role as the primary mover of this action research process fit into my established identity as a teacher and what that means as future cycles are carried out (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Mezirow, 1991).

Similarly, teachers have been encouraged to reflect on their practices with the goal of improvement since at least the time of Dewey (1929). Additionally, action research has been promoted as a way for school personnel to systematically improve practice since shortly after

its introduction in the late 1940's (Corey, 1953). By the 1970's researchers were calling for active teacher participation as the foundation for teachers' professional development (Stenhouse, 1975). My action research project was just another effort in this established model of change.

The expansive learning cycle (Engeström, Miettinen, Punamäki-Gitai, & International Congress for Research on Activity Theory, 1999; Engeström & Sannino, 2010) provided a key model for how I determined how well the department is progressed through a reflective cycle of action. This learning cycle (ELC) closely mirrors the action research cycle as laid out by Coghlan and Brannick (2005). Our diagnosing stage included the ELC's first two steps of questioning practice and analysis of the situation. The teachers were directed to critically reflect upon what they have been doing with literacy instruction so far and how well that matches the CCSS. The planning action stage includes the ELC's third step of modeling new solutions. Here the department needed to show it is actually creating new lessons that the teachers will use in class. When we got to the taking action stage of the action research cycle we were following the fourth and fifth steps of the ELC. We were simultaneously experimenting with the new instructional methods and implementing them. The final stage of the process, evaluating action, included the final two ELC's steps of reflecting on the new model and consolidating a new form of practice (Engeström et al., 1999). By this stage, the teachers had a better idea of what they need to do in order to bring literacy instruction fully into their pedagogy throughout the content area.

The teachers also needed to create this literacy instruction collaboratively. The knowledge creating metaphor has three criteria, which were used in part to determine the degree to which this group was working together to solve problems (Paavola & Hakkarainen,

2005). The first criterion to consider is whether new knowledge is building on knowledge and practices already shared among the group, rather than being imposed from an outside source or sole leader. The second criterion is that the new knowledge is created collectively. The teachers needed to develop the new literacy approach together and not just go along with what is being asked of them. The third criterion is that there should be evidence of interaction between the group and its individuals as the new knowledge and practice is then created.

Actions taken by the researcher in this action research study were aligned with the principles that have been laid out. The course of action my social studies department took incorporated reflection (Harkin, 2005; Jarvis, 2006), understood that new knowledge was being constructed (Vygotskiĭ, 1978) within our particular context (Brown et al., 1989; Warhurst, 2008), and was led by the teachers themselves (Georgalis et al., 2015; Lunenberg, Ponte, & Ven, 2007; Stenhouse, 1975).

## **Implementing Literacy Instruction**

### *Understanding the meaning of literacy*

Literacy has more than one meaning. The Oxford dictionary defines it in two ways. One is the ability to read and write and the other is competence or knowledge in a specific area (“Literacy,” 2015). This second definition closely approximates the medieval roots of the word literate from the Latin “literatus” or “one who knows the letters” (“Literate,” 2014). For the purposes of this study, it was helpful to define literacy in relation to the CCSS. This operationalized the term for the teachers in the action research project so they could better shape student outcomes.

Students who are college and career ready should be able to do certain things. They need to be able to understand complex material and write argumentative pieces without scaffolding. As the teachers develop literacy lessons over the next few years, they need to organize the course of their instruction in a way that increasingly puts the burden on students to write with less help. The goal of this literacy instruction is to prepare students to comprehend text on their own and be able to develop positions and defend them without guidance from the teacher.

These students should have a solid base of knowledge across disciplines and know how to navigate the expectations of communicating with others in those disciplines. The social studies teachers in this department are primarily responsible for their discipline, but that focus still helps students learn how to modify communication methods to specific audiences. The teachers in this study may not be able to help students directly with math or science, but they are only one part of the puzzle. Even if the teachers are only able to help the students in one part of their educational experience, the students are still better off for it.

Students who are college and career ready need to be critical of information sources and be able to weigh different forms of evidence. The teachers in this study are well positioned to develop these skills in their students. Social studies lends itself well to discussions on what constitutes evidence and how to evaluate the credibility of sources. Finally, these students should be comfortable with modern technology and the increasing interconnectedness of the world (California State Board of Education, 2013). Students who can accomplish these tasks *are* literate.

## *Reading comprehension*

Reading comprehension is key to literacy. The CCSS have brought a greater focus on informational text and social studies teachers need to change the way they approach written material (Boyd, 2015; Vansledright, 2004). Social studies teachers cannot just import techniques from English-language arts wholesale though. Teachers need to develop discipline-specific tactics and it is helpful if they think about how they themselves read in the content area (Gilles et al., 2013).

Many general reading comprehension strategies have been identified over the years. Simply reading a passage twice helps understanding (Gallavan & Kottler, 2002). Summarizing a text aids comprehension, but it must be done effectively (Winograd, 1984). Being able to make inferences about the direction a text is heading is also helpful (Hansen & Hubbard, 1984; T. E. Raphael & Pearson, 1985). Furthermore, students can be taught to monitor their own reading practices so they may be able to refine how they process textual information (Paris, Saarnio, & Cross, 1986).

Some specific reading comprehension strategies have evolved from these basic lessons. The Gradual Release Model is a form of scaffolding that begins with direct instruction from the teacher and slowly moves the activity level into the students' hands (Meyer, 1993; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Students are to become completely responsible for strategy use by the end (T. Raphael & Au, 1998; T. E. Raphael, Highfield, & Au, 2006). This model will work well for the teachers as they cultivate their students' ability to engage with texts and develop their own positions on issues. Students need to have control over reading comprehension (Pressley & Hargis, 2000). Reliance on teacher-controlled strategies leads to lower-level factual recall (Skidmore, Perez-Parent, & Arnfield, 2003) and a focus on

a single correct answer (Almansi, 2002). The intent of the CCSS is to move reading comprehension beyond these lower levels.

Student dialog and collaboration facilitates reading comprehension (Almansi, 2002) because learners construct knowledge by interacting with others (Vygotskiĭ, 1978). Students cannot, however, jump right into collaborative activities without training. Being able to discuss texts with peers is a skill that falls within students' zone of proximal development (Vygotskiĭ, 1978). Scaffolding is necessary to prepare students for such interactions (Meyer, 1993; Pearson & Gallagher, 1983; T. Raphael & Au, 1998). The teachers in this study will have to figure out how to incorporate student dialog in a way that eases the students into independent, collaborative work. This is an effort that will take years.

Teachers need to be aware of how they are developing student skills through scaffolding. Microgenetic scaffolding involves getting the students to understand a text in depth (Laing, 2006). This is the typical goal of a lesson, and was in use in this study, but teachers also have to develop students' ability to understand texts in general as well. Ontogenetic scaffolding is the long-term building of students' ability to interpret texts beyond specific classroom applications. A student who can do that independently is fulfilling the expectations of the CCSS. As the teachers continue to create their literacy instruction, they have to balance the short-term lesson goals with the long-term development of the students' ability to handle the Common Core.

Discussions about a text need to focus on building a curricular conversation (Applebee, Langer, & Nystrand, 2003) in which students adopt a questioning attitude about the text (Almansi, 2007). To facilitate such discussions, teachers need to pay attention to the quality of their own questions (Mikyung Kim Wolf, Crosson, & Resnick, 2005). Teachers

can raise the level of discourse by introducing a text with higher-level explanations (McIntyre, Kyle, & Moore, 2006). Students can be further encouraged to take on higher-level conversation through techniques such as questioning the author (McKeown & Beck, 2004) and keeping literature logs of the readings and their discussions (Saunders & Goldenberg, 1999). As this action research project progressed, the teachers had to carefully consider how they crafted their questions in order for students to maximize the learning. When done correctly, discussions about a reading can have a positive influence on comprehension (Fall, Webb, & Chudowsky, 2000; Van der Brendan, 2000).

### *Writing*

The ability to communicate effectively through writing is an important component of literacy as well. Grammar has had a foothold in education for hundreds of years and it is often joined with composition in writing instruction (Hillocks, 2008). This can dissuade content-area teachers, like in social studies, from making writing assignments a big part of their curriculum. The focus on the mechanics of writing, or the building block theory of writing development, follows from the logic McCabe (1971) uses, “Letters are linked to produce words; words, to produce sentences; sentences, to produce paragraphs; and paragraphs, to produce longer compositions.” (p. 509; as cited in Hillocks, 2008, p. 312). Social studies teachers are generally concerned with content and the new CCSS literacy expectations do match that.

The blending of grammar and composition is not the only hang up for social studies teachers when trying to teach writing. Berlin (1984) argues that a shift in the focus of rhetoric occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to emphasize scientific discourse. This helped create a split between the form and content of composition in writing instruction with the focus falling on

form (Hillocks, 2008). This focus on form has also contributed in deterring teachers in the department of study from incorporating writing instruction in the past.

Writing instruction in modern high schools is shaped by this legacy of trying to standardize writing practices and instruction. Applebee (1984) found that writing tasks were typically used to assess knowledge already presented in class, pre-writing activities lasted about three minutes, model pieces were used to introduce new forms of writing, most teachers asked for only one draft, and assessment of the writing included teacher comments on the paper concerning mechanics. Such activities have been common in this social studies department. More recently, Hillocks (2002) found teachers spending more time preparing students for writing and emphasizing longer compositions like the five paragraph essay. Students were also asked to consider their audience, engaging in peer review, yet still were only completing one draft. In both studies there is an underlying assumption in writing instruction that effective writing rests on just a few general principles (Hillocks, 2008).

Several strategies for improving students' writing have been identified in the past thirty years and can help guide this department's effort to improve writing instruction. Having student-led discussion groups tightly organized around solving a problem help students with their analyses (Hillocks, 1982; Nystrand, 1997). A supporting activity could be to have students look for certain patterns in data through inquiry or to have students develop scales to judge others' work. This teaches students how to write rather than what writing is (Hillocks, 2008). Teachers' comments on students' papers should be short and focused. This can improve students' writing ability even if no revision is required in the assignment, though doing so is better (Hillocks, 1982). Comments, though, should be anchored in previous class



instruction so the students' know what the teacher is talking about (Sperling, Freedman, & Educational Resources Information Center (U.S.), 1987).

De La Paz (2005) conducted an experimental study of middle school students using the self-regulated strategy development model (SRSD) to understand how the students could better make sense of historical documents with conflicting views and translate that understanding into written arguments. Embedded in SRSD is a gradual shift from teacher instruction and scaffolding to student-directed collaboration, something that the teachers in this department can incorporate. The students participated in a mock trial of the Cayuse Indians in the 1847 Whitman massacre. Students had to learn the background of the event, assume the roles of the participants, determine the reliability of differing accounts, discover how word choice in primary sources can indicate bias, and search for corroborating evidence.

For the writing portion of the study, the students were taught two different strategies to develop an argument for their position. The first one was "STOP." Before writing, the students were to suspend any judgment, take a side, organize their ideas, and plan their writing. The second strategy, "DARE," was used to help them write argumentative pieces that appealed to their audience. This strategy had them develop a topic sentence, add support, reject opposing arguments, and end with a conclusion. The students who learned these strategies wrote more persuasive papers, using more evidence, and displayed a deeper understanding of the historical content (De La Paz, 2005). This strategy was shared with the teachers in the department of study, but was not adopted by any of the course teams in their intervention.

Assessing writing can be challenging and it is a challenge the social studies teachers will continue to have to tackle. Reliability in testing has led to an emphasis on multiple-

choice (Hillocks, 2008), though properly constructed holistic rubrics can be reliable and more valid (Cooper & Odell, 1977). Harsch and Martin (2013) found that rubric scoring could be improved when augmenting the evaluation with an analytically based set of descriptors. The teachers in this study did have an opportunity to collaborate on strong rubrics for assessing student writing.

### *Vocabulary*

In social studies, vocabulary terms are tied to historical context and typically less precise than in other disciplines (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). Students need to become familiar with these terms within their context in order to properly make sense of social studies content (Baumann, Kame'enui, & Ash, 2003). Being literate in the social studies means, in part, that one is versed in the language and terminology used. In two experimental studies looking at English learners in Texas middle schools, Vaughn et al. (2009) wanted to identify the impact of specific social studies vocabulary instruction techniques. The two studies involved 50-minute per day, 9-12 week interventions in which teachers introduced the vocabulary words, showed videos explaining the terms with discussions following, had students write about the words and build graphic organizers, and then engage in paired discussions. The treatment groups in both studies ended up with significantly higher posttest scores, and this was true for both English learners in the classes and native English speakers. Purposeful vocabulary instruction is a powerful supplement to the reading and writing activities discussed above (Scammacca et al., 2007) and is something the social studies teachers can incorporate in their future plans, but did not heavily emphasize in this study.

### *Disciplinary literacy*

An approach to literacy that can be useful in the CCSS era is disciplinary literacy. Disciplinary literacy is an approach to literacy that aligns well with the aims of the CCSS (Carney & Indrisano, 2013). Disciplinary literacy goes beyond traditional notions of content are literacy by trying to get students to look at content through the methods of professionals in the field. Students are expected to dig deeper into texts and apply critical analysis in line with what is common in the discipline (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012).

Examples of this approach to literacy can be found in social studies. A reader in social studies needs to be more attuned to human agency when developing causal links than a reader in science (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012). The social studies reader also needs to pay more attention to authorship (Wineburg, 1998). Arguments in social studies are not based as heavily on pure logic as those in science or math. Therefore, the reader has to consider the weight of evidence for or against a proposition and who is making the argument also matters. Whether or not a text is a primary or secondary source ties in with authorship. A reader in social studies needs to be able to cross-reference information with other sources and known information about the historical period (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012).

## **Teacher Collaboration and Curriculum Development**

### *Developing an understanding of the CCSS*

The CCSS change the focus of instruction by providing new standards and new assessments to K-12 education. Teachers have to learn how to cope with these changes and develop new practices in their pedagogy. Given the scope of this shift to the CCSS, teachers

will need new training and support to be able to be able to meet their new expectations (Jenkins & Agamba, 2013).

Uncertainty can come from a lack of knowledge or consensus, different value systems within groups, and even just having to work with others in a group setting (Helsing, 2007). Not being sure about what to do can lead people in different directions. Some individuals might use uncertainty as motivation to work at understanding a phenomenon better (Britzman, 2007). Others, however, may become entrenched in comfortable routines to guard themselves from ambiguity (Floden & Clark, 1988). The success of this action research project rested on the members of the social studies department taking up the challenge of uncertainty and meeting the CCSS head on. This project sought to break the tendency of falling into old habits so that the department can stand as a model of how to teach in the CCSS era.

If teachers can come to accept uncertainty as a path for growth, then a drive for life-long learning can be cultivated (Melville & Pilot, 2014). This drive can be made even stronger when it is part of the group's culture (Henz, 2009). Professional learning can grow in a collaborative department when the individuals learn how to approach uncertainty as a tool for improvement (Rosenholtz, 1989). This department had to face such uncertainty in facing how to understand the role of the CCSS in social studies instruction.

#### *Creating a common approach to the CCSS*

Part of the CCSS expectations is that students will work together to solve problems. Collaborating with peers is an important career skill and one that the CCSS seek to foster (California State Board of Education, 2013). Social studies teachers are faced with a similar need to coordinate their efforts to bring the CCSS into their classrooms (Dougherty Stahl,

2015; Gilles et al., 2013). In order to be successful in this project, the teachers had to understand how work to work together productively, modify previous patterns of behavior, and adopt a culture of knowledge sharing.

Collaboration can yield important benefits, but it must be done right. In a case study of two high schools, Little (1995) looked at how distributed leadership among teachers could enhance organizational goals. The criteria Little wanted in the participating schools closely mirror the position this social studies department is in. First, the school needed to be working on rigor in its core curriculum. Second, the school needed to be working on increased interconnectedness across content areas. Third, the school was to be building a stronger transition for students to the workforce (Little, 1995). All three of these elements are integrated into the CCSS. Little's (1995) study found collaboration could work for teachers, but not at the expense of a teacher's sense of autonomy in the classroom. Teachers are willing to work together, but are not willing to be controlled by group consensus.

How norms are set and agendas are created makes a difference in teachers' ability to collaborate. Young (2006) conducted a study of four high schools to determine how teachers come to make decisions about data. He found that agendas need to align throughout the organization's hierarchy. The district, school, and teachers should agree on what is important and worthy of their efforts. Teachers also do better when they have established norms for working together and can be more comfortable treating all the students as their own rather than guarding their particular classes. Finally, building an organizational structure that delineates specific roles for teachers and administrators helps the school maintain focus and momentum.

Organizational routines are often seen as a source of stability (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). Routines establish patterns that people follow and can end up becoming part of the culture (Huber, 1991). However, routines can be a source of organizational learning (Argote, 1999). Feldman and Pentland (2003) argue that there are two sides to organizational routines. The first part of routine behavior is the ostensive aspect, or standard operating procedures. This is what people think about when they see routines as static and even counterproductive. However, procedures or rules alone cannot fully guide human behavior. There are always different contexts to make decisions within. The performative aspect of routines involves what people are actually doing when conducting routine behavior. This is where the door opens to change.

When people are performing routines, there is always going to be room for improvisation (Orlikowski, 2000). While routines may involve repetitive patterns adopted by different individuals, slight changes will occur over time as people improvise through varying contexts. Organizational routines can then be managed for different purposes. Deviations from standard practices can be made to accommodate new goals and, subsequently, procedures can be reinforced to solidify the new direction (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). This social studies department already had collaborative routines in place that were modified for the purposes of introducing literacy instruction. Thus, this action research project did not require a completely new set of operations for the department. It did, however, allow for new performances within established routines to meet the context of the addition of the CCSS.

Schein's (2010) work on organizational culture helps frame the depth of the change that needs to occur in the department. Schein distinguishes between three levels of culture. First are the cultural artifacts of the department. These are the products of the culture like

practices, documentation, and physical layout. Artifacts are the easiest evidence of the culture to get at, but the most difficult to understand by themselves. The next level of culture is the department's espoused beliefs. These are the beliefs that the members of the culture express. It takes some extra work to begin to understand a group's espoused beliefs, but it can be done. The researcher must proceed with caution however, because the group's espoused beliefs might betray their true orientation. This can be true even if the members of the culture do not know it. Lastly, the underlying assumptions, or true foundational belief system, have to be deduced from all of the data previously gathered about the culture's artifacts and espoused beliefs. It is at this level that the department needs to change if it is to embrace the Common Core.

Horn and Little (2010) conducted a two-year study to evaluate the impact of work-related conversation on sustaining teacher learning. The establishment of conversational routines can make collaborative efforts stronger. These routines can help build true professional learning communities (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Horn and Little's (2010) analysis found that teachers need to have a desire to improve in their profession, but that by itself is not enough. The way teachers talk to each other is also important. Conversations need to be open, directed at specific problems, and routine. When meaningful conversations directed at specific problems (Horn & Little, 2010), about established and well-supported goals (Young, 2006) start to happen at a site, purposeful collaboration towards implementing the CCSS can start happening (Dougherty Stahl, 2015; Gilles et al., 2013).

### *Current Common Core resources*

Several organizations have been developing resources for social studies teachers now that we have the CCSS. The social studies department in this study was able to use some of the following resources as they create their own literacy instruction. For each course team, portfolios (Appendix G) were compiled that included sample lessons that teach literacy in social studies. Each teacher was furnished a copy along with lesson templates to use when building their own lessons. As the teachers collaborated within their teams on new literacy lessons, they were able to use these samples to help shape how they delivered the content they chose to work with. These portfolios also contained excerpts from articles on literacy in social studies to help the teachers build a base of knowledge about literacy instruction.

Stanford's History Education Group has created an array of lessons across subject and grade levels that can be modified to fit this department's needs. The state of California has seven History-Social Science Projects, including one at UCLA, designed to support K-12 social studies teachers with the CCSS. These projects offer professional development, like CCSS workshops, to enhance the quality of social studies instruction in the state. The department in this study was able to make use of the primary sources and sample lessons supplied.

The National Council for the Social Studies also provides professional development through workshops and online tools that the department can access. This organization has also been instrumental in the creation of the C3 framework, a set of guidelines to help social studies teachers meet the expectations of the CCSS. The full name of this framework is the "College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History."



This document did provide a roadmap for how the department can gear instruction towards college and career readiness, though the teachers ended up giving it only a cursory look.

Finally, The California Council for the Social Studies is another organization with resources to draw on. This group provides similar support to the national organization, but with a focus on teachers in California. In the future, that can provide this department with the most targeted assistance, as the resources available will best match the content taught at the site. Together, these four organizations offer a great deal of support for this department as it struggles to meet the CCSS without formal professional development.

### **Importance of the Study**

The CCSS are currently in the process of being rolled out. The timeline for the implementation of the standards started in 2013 and will run through 2018. This action research project took place just as the Smarter Balanced assessment began and a new set of accountability measures were taking hold in California's public schools. However, social studies teachers are not currently a focus, as the Smarter Balanced assessment targets only English/language-arts and mathematics. Many districts have put their time and money into professional development for English and math teachers without being too concerned about social studies at this point. This study evaluated how one social studies department in such a district is coping with being left out of the loop and how they are developing their own curriculum to meet the challenges of the CCSS.

## CHAPTER 3

The introduction of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has changed the expectations for content-area teachers to provide a deeper focus on literacy. A problem for social studies teachers in this transition to the CCSS is that many have not had the same type of guidance as English and math teachers regarding standards, instructional materials, practice assessments, and professional development.

Some social studies departments have had no professional development whatsoever in the implementation of the CCSS. However, California's new accountability measure for schools incorporates the Smarter Balanced assessment, which began in the 2014-15 school year. Social studies content is not being directly tested, but a school's assessment scores will reflect student abilities in areas for which social studies teachers have some responsibility, namely reading and writing.

The move towards more intense literacy instruction is a recent change. The California Standards Test (CST) was much more focused on the ability of students to recall a large number of facts. This change to a curriculum emphasizing higher-order thinking may be positive, but social studies teachers like those included in this study are making the change without complete guidance (Gilles et al., 2013; Jenkins & Agamba, 2013).

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the process of developing a set of Common Core State Standards literacy lessons in a social studies department?
  - A. How do teachers respond (motivated, discouraged, etc.) to the need to incorporate more literacy instruction in their classes?

- B. How do teachers collectively select the literacy strategies they will incorporate into social studies content courses?
- C. To what degree, if any, do teachers report that the department's collaboration meetings helped them improve their literacy instruction?
- D. What forces are contributing to their understanding of the Common Core's role in social studies and what forces are hindering their understanding?

### **Research Design**

The introduction of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) leaves many high school academic departments across the nation struggling to modify their curriculum to meet the new changes (Boyd, 2015; Steadman & Evans, 2013). There has been mixed reaction to, and preparation for, the CCSS. History, in particular, is a subject behind in the development of both standards and instructional materials.

My study brought together a social studies department that has received no training in the CCSS to develop its own literacy instruction in support of English-Language Arts (ELA) and historical content. I took a constructivist approach as my department attempted to come to an understanding of what literacy instruction means for us and how it will be established under the new CCSS.

This study was a qualitative action research project. The participants were teachers in the history department at a suburban high school. The four course leaders from the core subjects of 10<sup>th</sup> grade world history, 11<sup>th</sup> grade U.S. history, 12<sup>th</sup> grade government, and 12<sup>th</sup> grade economics were included as members of the action research team. Besides myself, the

team also included the department chair and an assistant principal and district administrator that were invited to participate but did so only by reviewing the findings.

The use of action research aligns with the collaborative nature of developing a curriculum in-house (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). Furthermore, a qualitative approach best addressed the nuances of how we can understand the meaning of literacy instruction within our department as we move forward. Quantitative analysis proved not to be that helpful in measuring the effect of the intervention due to the small sample size and brief timeframe of the study. It was also not suited to aid in understanding the process behind how these teachers developed the intervention in the first place.

Action research is done in cycles. Each cycle involves a set of steps that the researchers go through to effect change. Consecutive cycles build on the learning done in earlier cycles, as this is an iterative process. Before these steps can begin, however, a pre-step defining the context and purpose of the project is necessary. In this pre-step, the researchers need to determine the purpose for the project, the context it will take place in, the participants involved, and the intended outcome. The researchers can then move on to the main steps once they have defined the context and purpose of the study (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

The first step in an action research cycle is diagnosis. It is here that the problem becomes well defined. Diagnosing the problem is a collaborative effort and should not be done solely by the principal researcher. The second step in the cycle is planning action. The action research team determines the course of action to take given the problem they have identified and the context they are working in. The third step is to take action. This is also known as the intervention. Whatever corrective action was determined necessary in the previous steps is now carried out. Finally, the fourth step is to evaluate the effectiveness of

the intervention. The action research team reviews what happened, analyzes the results, and plans where to take their next course of action. Again, this is an iterative process so the end of one cycle simply leads into the next cycle (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

Studying an action research project involves a meta cycle of inquiry (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). This is a separate cycle of reflection about the process explained above. The individual studying an action research project needs to go through the same steps in determining how the core action research cycle is progressing (Zuber-Skerritt & Perry, 2002). The meta cycle of inquiry uses Mezirow's (1991) forms of reflection (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

The charge of a researcher of an action research project is to reflect on the development of each step of the core cycle's development and evaluate the effectiveness of each. Also, the processes used by the action research team within each step need to be evaluated for how well they contribute to the entire cycle. Finally, the researcher needs to reflect upon the assumptions participants bring into their work and how these guide the decisions they are making (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005).

## **Methods**

### *Site and population*

This study was conducted at a typical suburban high school in southern California. The student demographics mirror that of the state at large in most respects, although the surrounding community has a higher median income. The school also reported higher academic measures (API, graduation rate, CST scores) than most schools of its size and demographics (Appendix A). The social studies department included 17 teachers, 16 of

whom teach the core subjects that were a part of this study. I was one of the core-subject teachers and assumed the role of participant-observer in this action research project (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

Teachers of most subjects at the school are organized in course teams, each with a team leader. In a typical academic year, the team will meet for two-hour blocks three times and in one-hour blocks about five times. These teams have developed a culture of collaborating on common assessments, sharing strategies, and setting achievement goals. However, most of this work was done under the old standards and CST. Working on literacy for the CCSS is new territory and may present new challenges for collaboration.

Questionnaires were administered to all 17 of the teachers, but interviews were only conducted on a sample of two teachers from each of the four core subjects. The interviews were not completely random, but stratified by subject area (Merriam, 2009). Equal-sized samples were randomly drawn from each of the four core course subjects, taking care not to choose the same individual in two separate courses. A sample of two teachers to interview per course subject resulted in eight of the 16 core-subject teachers having a role in this data collection method.

No teacher in the department declined to be in the study.

### *The project*

The first step in the research process was to create an action research team that would guide the cycles in the 2015-16 school year. Each of the four core course teams (world history, U.S. history, government, and economics) has a course team leader. These teachers were already responsible for guiding the teams and they were very familiar with the structure of this project. Also included in the action research team was the department chair and myself

One assistant principal and a district administrator were invited to join, but did not play any direct role in guiding the project. The team was established towards the beginning of the 2015-16 school year.

The course teams had their first meeting for this study in October of 2015. The purpose of the first meeting was to review the expectations of the CCSS, the goals of the study, some literature on literacy, and model lessons used in other schools. This was the diagnostic stage of the action research cycle. It also presented the first look at how teachers would make sense of literacy within their context and how that would set the path towards professional change. Documents from the meetings were analyzed along with survey data on what the teachers thought about their ability to implement literacy instruction.

The planning action stage took place in November. At this stage, the teachers were in their subject teams creating the actual lessons they would implement in their respective courses. These lessons were the intervention for this action research project. A window of up to eight weeks was provided to allow teachers time to fit the lessons into their unit plans without disruption. Evidence of how their plans were implemented was analyzed by cross-checking documents from the meetings with the interviews.

The review stage followed the intervention in the third quarter of the school year during February. The teachers discussed, in their course team meetings, how the literacy lessons worked, sharing both successes and obstacles. The teachers used their own data on student achievement to analyze how the lessons worked. However, the data collected for the study came from the surveys and interviews of randomly selected teachers in each course team. I also conducted observations of the meetings and collected documentation of the work they did within their course teams.

### *Data collection methods*

I conducted an action research project and my research questions were aimed at understanding how the process progressed. In the course of the action research cycle student data, such as writing samples, were collected by the teachers but was only for the purposes of the teachers' analysis. I was studying how the teachers go about that analysis and therefore collected data to that end. Each data collection method corresponded to specific research questions as listed in Appendix B.

This action research project involved several meetings where the four course teams developed literacy lessons to implement. All of the agendas and any minutes (provided by the course team leaders) from these meetings were collected. Also, I recorded each meeting in order to capture a more complete picture of what was going on. To corroborate what was planned in the meetings, I conducted interviews with a random sample of teachers in the department. The interviews probed how the teachers thought the lessons went and were recorded on audio and then transcribed.

During the evaluating action phase of the cycle, I again collected agendas, any minutes, and the meetings were recorded. I was also still interviewing teachers during this time about how the entire process went for them. Finally, I surveyed the entire department with a questionnaire about their general thoughts on the process and their commitment to continue with implementing literacy instruction in this format.

### *Stages of the data collection process*

Data collection followed the action research cycle. Each stage in the cycle focuses on a different part of the process and data collection matched that focus. A preliminary survey instrument was administered to the members of the department during the diagnostic stage



(Appendix C). This instrument was designed to paint a picture of where the department members were in their understanding of literacy instruction and to determine their degree of training in Common Core instruction. Observations of the first collaborative meetings as well as the documents produced at these meetings were collected to determine how each course team was developing their approach to working on literacy instruction.

The second stage of the action research cycle, planning action, was recorded via observation and document collection. This stage involved the course teams meeting to create literacy-specific lesson plans to administer in their classes. I observed these meetings in person and by video recording. I also collected artifacts from these meetings, including agendas, minutes, and the lesson plans created.

The third stage was taking action. The teachers administered literacy lessons over about an eight-week period. I began conducting interviews with two teachers randomly chosen from each of the four course teams to learn about how these lessons were working in class. The interviews were also used to probe into the teachers' perceptions about how the process as a whole was working and their views on how the collaborative meetings were helping their literacy instruction.

The fourth and final stage of the process was evaluating action. Data collection for this stage mirrored what I did at the beginning of the study. I administered a final survey (Appendix H) to everyone in the department to understand their views on literacy instruction, the collaborative process, and their willingness to move forward with this model. Each course team meeting was observed by video to assess the teachers' collaborative work. I also collected all documents produced at these meetings for analysis.

### *Data collection detail by method*

#### Survey

Questionnaires were administered at the beginning and end of the action research cycle. Paper questionnaires were distributed at department meetings where almost everyone was present and I followed up individually with absent teachers. The questionnaires did not take more than fifteen minutes to complete because they were not designed to provide in-depth quantitative insight into what happened. They were broad gauges to capture some of the key views of everyone in the department. The pre and post questionnaires mostly provided data for the department to use as it determines its needs and future course of action. I did not use that data as a sole source to make definitive claims on how the teachers were progressing towards second-order change (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974).

The data collected from the two surveys was input into the program, SPSS. I ran descriptive statistics on the necessary items and developed a short document to publicize findings relevant to the department. This document included charts and tables to show the teachers how the department is doing relative to the measures assessed by the surveys (Appendix I).

#### Observation

I could not be at every collaboration meeting that our department had during the study. In order to observe all of the meetings, I had to record them. A video camera was placed towards the back corner of every room during all of the collaboration meetings we had. This included the meetings I was in as well. That way I could participate in the meeting without being distracted by trying to record everything that was going on. Each meeting was reviewed with my observation instrument (Appendix E) to analyze the visual cues between

teachers, references to literacy and the CCCS, the degree of collaboration, and alignment with what teachers were reporting in their documents and interviews.

### Interview

I asked each teacher in the department whether or not they would be willing to participate in an interview and no one objected. The name of each teacher was put into a bag labeled with his or her course team. One bag was prepared for each of the four course teams (world history, U.S. history, government, and economics). Several teachers were a part of more than one course team so I started the interview selection with government and economics because they have the fewest teachers. Two names were chosen from each bag. If a teacher was picked in government or economics who also teaches a history course, their name was removed from the world or U.S. history bag before selection for that course. This way no teacher could get picked twice for interviews (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). Teachers who were selected for an interview were notified by email that they had been chosen. I then scheduled a time to meet with them. Interviews were conducted after school for about 45 minutes. This selection method yielded eight different teachers from the department and happened to include each course team leader and the department chair.

### Document Collection

All of the collaboration meetings our department conducted produced documents that I collected (Appendix G). The course team lead was already responsible for producing an agenda and collecting minutes for every meeting. Minutes for the meetings were not always available, but agendas were. I also collected the resources that the teachers used to plan their literacy lessons when available. Once these lessons were created, I gathered those plans and then the assessment instruments the teachers used to evaluate the lessons.

Each of the documents were analyzed to match our action research process to the elements discussed below (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

### *Data analysis methods*

Data analysis began with a three-layered approach to see how well the work of this department was matching Engleström's (1999) expansive learning cycle, Paavola and Hakkarainen's (2005) knowledge creating metaphor, and Argyris and Schön's (1978) double-loop learning. To assess the department's progress towards double-loop learning, I employed Schein's (2010) delineation of organizational culture to probe down past the artifacts and espoused beliefs of the department to get a view of the true underlying assumptions.

The action research process this department conducted was tested against the expansive learning cycle (Engeström, 1999). This learning cycle (ELC) closely mirrors the action research cycle as laid out by Coghlan and Brannick (2005). I started by coding the data from my observations, interviews and documents to match the steps in the ELC. Our diagnosing stage was to include the ELC's first two steps of questioning practice and analysis of the situation. The planning action stage included the ELC's third step of modeling new solutions. When we got to the taking action stage of the action research cycle we were following the fourth and fifth steps of the ELC. We were simultaneously experimenting with the new model and implementing it. The final stage of the process, evaluating action, included the final two ELC's steps of reflecting on the new model and consolidating a new form of practice (Engeström, 1999).

The next layer of analysis was designed to measure the degree this process was being done collaboratively. The knowledge creating metaphor has three criteria, which can be applied in this study (Paavola & Hakkarainen, 2005). Again, coding of the data from the

same collection methods above matched these three criteria. The first criterion to consider was whether new knowledge was building on knowledge and practices already shared among the group, rather than being imposed from an outside source or sole leader. The second criterion was that the new knowledge was created collectively. The teachers needed to be developing the new literacy approach together and not just going along with what was being asked of them. The third criterion was that there should be evidence of interaction between the group and its individuals as the new knowledge and practice was created. I looked for examples of teachers being moved to provide suggestions for lesson plans as ideas were developing in the group. Conversely, the group should have been taking some of these individual suggestions to modify their collective sense of what they were planning to do.

The final layer of analysis was designed to probe the depth of the department's change towards improved literacy instruction. Argyris and Schön (1978) distinguish between single-loop learning and double-loop learning. The former is a change in practice or routine without any fundamental shift in beliefs. The latter involves a change in the learner or organization at its core. This change can redefine the purpose of an organization. For this department, I was looking at how well the group is moving towards a different understanding of what literacy instruction means in the Common Core era. While teachers across subjects have long known the importance of deeper learning and developing literacy in their subjects, the Common Core and Smarter Balance Assessment present an entire new set of expectations and associated accountability measures that can leave those resistant to change far behind.

To measure the department's steps towards double-loop learning, I applied Schein's (2010) work on organizational culture. My surveys and document collection provided the cultural artifacts of the department. Data from these were coded for a dichotomous set of

themes: single-loop learning and double-loop learning. The next level of culture is the department's espoused beliefs. These beliefs were drawn out mainly through the surveys, observations, and interviews. Again, coding was applied to single-loop and double-loop themes. Lastly, the underlying assumptions had to be deduced from all of the data. It is at this level that the department needs to change if it is to embrace the Common Core. I could not fully understand whether the department's underlying assumptions are changing (actual double-loop learning) until the end of the action research cycle.

Appendix D shows how each of these three layers fit into the action research cycle. The expansive learning cycle (in blue) is made up of stages similar to an action research cycle. The important questions to ask at each action research phase began the analysis. The next level of analysis is the knowledge creating metaphor (in gold). I was looking for three distinct phenomenon across the action research cycle. These phenomenon do follow chronologically with the action research cycle, but overlap the phases. Finally, I was looking for evidence of double-loop learning and the beginnings of second-order change (Watzlawick et al., 1974) in the department. The three levels of culture (in purple) articulated by Schein (2010) were analyzed for signs of change. All together, these three layers of analysis designed to be able to paint a picture of how the department is progressing towards incorporating literacy instruction.

### **Ethical Issues**

This was an action research project where I was one of the members of the team. While I can mask the names of the school and participants, I cannot mask my own name and this provides a window into identifying the participants. I took care to hide any identifying

characteristics of individual teachers (by providing pseudonyms for example), but a diligent researcher could find the school. Teachers could have also discussed problems that came up in their collaboration meetings with others outside of the department and I had to be honest with them that I could not do much to prevent that. However, that concern never materialized. I was upfront about how well I could protect the teachers' anonymity and I let them decide whether they would like to continue with the study or not. I did also compensate the department members by providing a luncheon at the end of the study and \$10 gift cards for interviewees and course team leaders.

### **Reliability and Validity**

This action research project involved 17 participants so the sample size is not large enough to justify generalizing my findings. In order to support trustworthiness in this study, I took the following measures: First, I had in-depth interview and observation records. These records contained as many details as reasonably possible so others may have an easier time finding evidence for my findings. Second, I have documentation outlining what the department looked like before the action research intervention and after. Readers can follow the changes that occurred over this period. Third, I triangulated data from interviews, meeting documents, surveys, and observations to corroborate findings. Finally, everything I did in the process was documented thoroughly as to provide a paper trail of the entire project (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

My three-layered analysis provides a solid backbone to the study's findings (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009). I articulate the progression of the action research process and how the actions of the teachers in the department matched the literature on how adults learn in

collaborative settings. Evidence of this learning is in multiple forms (matching my data collection methods) to guard against relying on too few examples of a specific finding. I was not able build a case for double-loop learning in the department, but that realization did come by digging down through the levels of organizational culture. Given that I gathered a wide array of cultural artifacts and interviewed half of the department about their espoused beliefs, I was able to uncover at least part of the department's underlying assumptions about literacy instruction. As we moved through the entire project I was able to detect differences in these assumptions and decipher whether the department was actually moving towards double-loop learning and second-order change.

Another area that I needed to consider is my biases. In order to address bias I did conduct member checks after interviews and observations. Also, I used random sampling for my interviews and observations, while surveys were administered to everyone in the department (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

## **Summary**

My study was an action research project that documents a social studies department's initiative to start developing literacy instruction that meets the expectations of the Common Core. This department has not had formal training in the Common Core and its members are doing this work by themselves. The stages of the research project took the department through a needs analysis to lesson planning, actual instruction, and finally an evaluation of what worked so modifications can be made going forward. I studied how well the teachers are working together to create a common approach to literacy instruction. My analysis included the degree of collaboration involved, how much buy-in that generated, and



therefore how deep the change in practice can go. The department did not experience a radical transition in practice in the period of time allotted for the study, but evidence of the potential for a shift in progress did show up by the end of the action research cycle.

## CHAPTER 4

This study followed a high school social studies department through an action research process to improve Common Core instruction. Social studies departments are not receiving the same level of professional development in the Common Core (CCSS) as English and math departments (Jenkins & Agamba, 2013). The lack of training in specific CCSS instructional techniques, even the wording of the standards themselves, has impacted the ability of these teachers to match their pedagogy with the expectations these new standards bring. Action research was chosen because it is a well-established model of professional development that can aid teachers in their own attempt to build an understanding of what is expected of them. The main goal of this study was to pinpoint what forces can help teachers in this process and what obstacles need to be overcome in this work. The lessons learned from this department's action research are presented below.

Specific research questions guided this inquiry and they provided the foundation for the main goal of understanding what is helping these teachers move forward and what is holding them back. The research questions are:

1. What is the process of developing a set of Common Core State Standards literacy lessons in a social studies department?
  - A. How do teachers respond (motivated, discouraged, etc.) to the need to incorporate more literacy instruction in their classes?
  - B. How do teachers collectively select the literacy strategies they will incorporate into social studies content courses?

- C. To what degree, if any, do teachers report that the department's collaboration meetings helped them improve their literacy instruction?
- D. What forces are contributing to their understanding of the Common Core's role in social studies and what forces are hindering their understanding?

The social studies department went through an action research cycle from October 2015 to April 2016. The purpose for doing this was to build a deeper understanding of how Common Core instruction will look in social studies classes over the next few years. The process did not unfold exactly as planned, but every main step was taken and a full cycle was completed.

The findings show that, even after beginning to implement some Common Core strategies, this department does not have a complete grasp of the role of the Common Core in social studies and that the action research process used to improve that understanding revealed certain forces contributing to their understanding and hindering their understanding. The contributing forces include the collaborative culture, accountability to each other, and the motivation to move forward. The hindering forces are a lack of understanding about the Common Core, a lack of resources to mitigate that misunderstanding, and the time to be able to do the necessary work on literacy-enhancing instruction.

### **The Department**

The social studies department in this study is made up of 17 teachers. One of them did not teach any of the four core subjects during the study and another was on maternity leave

for much of the time. Everybody, including the two not playing a big role, agreed to participate in the study and did so at least to the level of participating in the meetings.

The action research team included the four course team leaders (world history, U.S. history, government, and economics) and the department chair. The team leaders all have worked at the school for at least five years and each of them has a master's degree in educational leadership and holds a preliminary administrative credential. I was the world history course lead. The department chair has been at the school for over a decade and has received awards for distinguished teaching ability. This group led each of the core subjects through the action research process and was instrumental in getting their team members to keep up with the project.

Most of the teachers at the school teach two subjects and so most teachers went through the process of developing a Common Core lesson, teaching it, and reflecting on it twice. Every teacher that was selected for an interview also agreed to sit for it. Across all experience levels, from two years on the job to twenty-two, the teachers had some interest in improving their practice through this project. In fact, all of the teachers interviewed were glad to have gone through this and felt it did help them understand the Common Core better.

The principal of the school and the assistant principal of instruction were invited to play whatever role they would like in the project. Traditionally, the administration at this school has been confident in the ability of the social studies department to work independently and that held true for this project. Administrators checked in a couple of times during the meetings and would communicate broad expectations to the department chair about setting and meeting goals, but did not actively direct any of the action research activities. An administrator from the district was also invited to join the meetings but was unable to attend.

This person did, however, maintain communication with me throughout and attended a presentation of the findings along with two other district representatives.

### **The Action Research Process**

The teachers are aware that they need assistance in understanding how they can modify their instruction to meet the expectations of the Common Core. That is why they agreed to be a part of this study. Indeed, every teacher agreed to participate. This department used this study to embark on a greater understanding of the Common Core; what Engeström (1999) calls expansive learning. The department was able to map this project on to pre-established collaborative routines broken up by core subject area, with the action research team being made up of the team leaders already in place.

#### *Diagnosis*

The action research process began with a diagnosis of the problem. This diagnosis was started informally at the beginning of the school year, but became more structured when the study officially began in October 2015. The diagnosis stage was not as strong as the subsequent stages for a few reasons. First, it was impacted by the late start of the study, two months into the school year. Second, transitioning to the Common Core was not seen as overwhelmingly urgent, largely because there is no state assessment in social studies yet. The first push out of the gate, seen in early emails and discussed at the first meetings of the year, was the National Council for Social Studies' C3 Framework. The department chair was pushing us to consider this more developed set of higher-order goals for teaching that appear better tailored to social studies than the Common Core. No

communication from administration to the teachers related to the Common Core and its role in social studies happened in the first month of school.

One factor promoting a lack of urgency is a lack of trust in how long the Common Core will last. The comments politicians make about Common Core would be brought up in meetings and interviews. Dorothy, an economics teacher, worried about, “the negativity that is already out there in the community regarding the Common Core.” The lack of urgency can also be explained by the sense that teachers still think there is something out there that has not reached social studies yet, as explained below. Of course, comments about the Common Core were not immune to the regular routine of change and “the next big thing” educators always face. Grace put it nicely:

I think we keep trying to fix the education system because we’ve noticed that we have gone down worldwide. And, so with every new program or method or whatever, Common Core, no kid left behind, that it’s just a label attached to the obvious. That there’s a problem and I don’t know that it’s a problem necessarily in the education system itself because I... There is no way that [education] alone could have such an effect. I think it’s an overall societal issue but obviously education gets blamed for the majority of the problems.

The teachers would talk in meetings about the feeling that they must shoulder the burdens of society; that politicians will use public schooling as a way to address problems without considering the effect that has on classroom instruction.

### *Planning*

The planning of the intervention happened in different ways for each of the four course teams, but all involved collaboration on various aspects of the lesson. The world history and economics teams created their lessons completely from scratch. Both lessons involved a central question the students were to answer using primary source documents collected by the teachers. Both lessons also involved an organizational step that prepared the

students for the essay they were to write. The U.S. history and government teams had similar lessons, but they were previously produced document-based questions (DBQ's). These lessons were found on the Internet.

The world history lesson was on the causes of the First World War. The teachers created the lesson by gathering primary sources documents on the various causes and discussing how to modify them for the students. A question was then developed for the students to answer and a chart was organized to help the students prepare for their essay. At each step, teachers in the meeting went back and forth between each other collectively building the lesson using their own experiences in the classroom.

The economics lesson was developed in much the same manner. The teachers decided to focus on the minimum wage. The students were asked to write a persuasive essay on whether or not the minimum wage should be raised. The teachers pulled together sources on the subject from news articles and government reports and edited them for ease of use by the students. This was another example of the teachers building on shared knowledge and collectively creating a new model for Common Core instruction.

The U.S. history and government course teams did use lessons that were already made, but did make modifications. Most of that work was altering the wording of the questions asked of students and creating a rubric. In U.S. history, discussion about the rubric bounced between different teachers' thoughts on what are the most important skills they want to see in their students. One teacher, Cary, introduced the idea that they should have a standard rubric to use for all of their common writing assignments. He said this would allow the teachers to track the progress of the students over the course of the year. By chance, an

English teacher stopped by and offered to give the teachers the English department's rubric. They did not end up using it in their Common Core lesson, but may in the future.

Though the U.S. history teachers did work together to modify the DBQ they chose for the intervention lesson, the amount of discussion they had actually led to some confusion. The reflections they did and the evaluation stage meeting revealed that many teachers ended up using different prompts when delivering the lesson. The question they were agreeing to ask got lost in the discussion on how to assess it through the rubric.

The problem with the U.S. history prompt was not the only to arise between the diagnostic and planning stages. All of the lessons chosen were picked before deciding what standards they address. I had a form laying out the Common Core standards we would look at in the project (Appendix G). The teachers were to fill out what lessons they already do that meet the specific Common Core standards. I would then compile what everyone in the course team was doing and give it back to them to target key standards for the intervention lesson. Only 60% of these forms were ever turned in and only five of them on time. Because of this, the teachers in each subject team jumped into the selection of a lesson without having fully analyzed their current practice in a structured way. The Common Core standards each lesson addressed were picked after the lesson was created.

### *Implementation*

The actual lessons the teachers implemented took place over a period of three months. U.S. history classes got started the earliest, in November 2015. By contrast the world history lessons stretched into February 2015. On average, each of the four intervention lessons lasted two days.



Similar issues emerged across the subjects as evidenced by the reflections the teachers wrote and what they discussed in the evaluation phase meetings. Each course team experienced some success with the lessons and uncovered some challenges they will have to address in the future. An example of the success with students they found in doing this was that the students were able to understand the primary sources as revealed in class discussion, but just did not translate that knowledge well into the written part. The seniors in economics were better at using evidence and even appropriate personal experience, but not all of them.

The biggest problem the teachers ran into was the students' writing ability. Reflections from each of the course teams showed this concern with student writing. While the teachers could tell that the students were able to analyze the issue the primary sources were covering, they could not always back up their written arguments with appropriate evidence. This was evident in all four subjects.

Another problem teachers noticed about the students' literacy skill came through in the interviews. Every teacher interviewed was concerned about whether the students would be able to do this work independently in the future. Cary, a U.S. history teacher, made the comment, "you can't just throw a primary document in front of somebody and say 'good luck.' I mean I'll break it down for them." Sophia was one of three teachers that did talk about removing this type of scaffolding over the course of a year. She said,

The independent practice and the ability to be given a handout or reading or read out of the book and then do it completely on their own, I think would definitely be a struggle. At least at the beginning of the year. So, I think I would see it more over the first semester. Practicing with them during guiding practice and eventually at the second semester that being something that's so common and so consistent... that they'll be able to finally do it completely on their own. And, it would also have to be something that is a repeated strategy so that they're comfortable with it.

However, a related issue Grace noted was how well the students are able to transfer skills between different contexts. She said:

I'm kind of curious what goes on in English classes based on their reading and writing. Because, when I do get some papers, and I don't know if it's just the students thinking that because it's not an English class that I'm not going to check for spelling and grammar.

This raises the concern that if students are not independently applying basic writing conventions without assistance, can they attack the higher-level analytical work by themselves?

A similar idea was relayed by Debra when saying that, "it's frustrating as a teacher because they don't know how to transfer MLA format from English to history so I don't know if they can take a strategy if shown to them and transfer it."

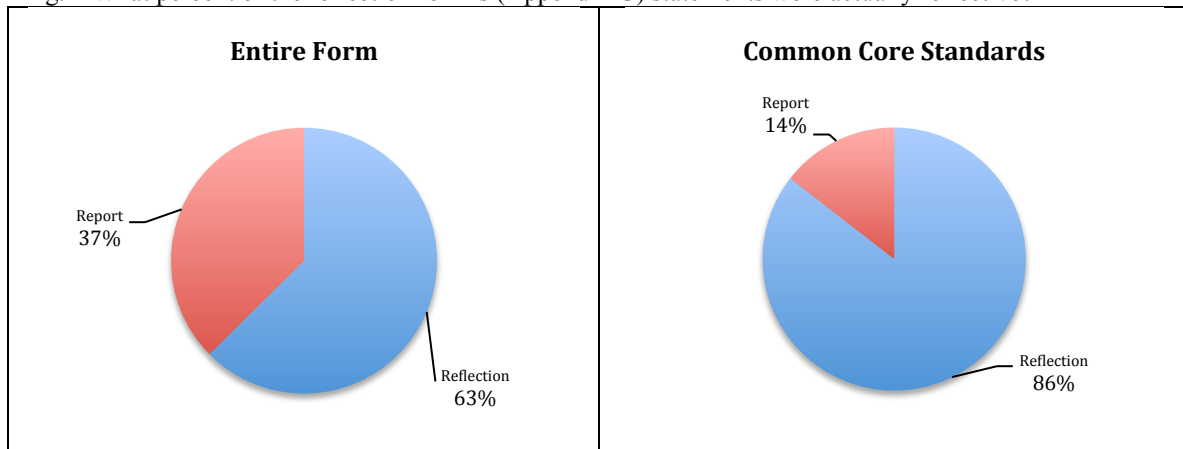
The point of the Common Core is to have students be able to analyze information and write about it independently. However, at this point the teacher is always leading these types of activities in this department. This was the case with each of the intervention lessons. Observations in every evaluation phase meeting showed that the teachers had walked the students through all or part of the primary sources as a class before having them respond to the prompts. The Gradual Release Model was never really used.

Another thing for the teachers to consider is that all of the intervention lessons were assessments. None of the lessons actually called for the teachers to instruct students on how to analyze text and develop a response. The analysis ended up happening as a class most of the time and the writing was structured for them.

*Evaluation*

The evaluation stage of the cycle went well. The early trouble of jumping into planning without formally analyzing the situation did not happen. The teachers took the time to do the reflection and get it done in a timely manner. Ninety-five percent of the reflection forms were turned in. Also, in completing the reflection of how the lesson went, the teachers did a good job of actually analyzing and reflecting on what happened rather than just reporting what took place (Figure 1). This was even better when reflecting specifically on how each Common Core standard worked out in the lesson. I counted reflective statements as those that were focused on how students did and what could be changed versus just stating what the students or teacher did.

Fig. 1 What percent of the reflection form's (Appendix G) statements were actually reflective?



In the meetings, everyone took turns talking about how the lessons went and what they would change next time they did that lesson. Much of that discussion did involve the issues with student writing presented above. What also happened at these meetings, though, was a discussion on how well this project had helped the teachers' understanding of the Common Core and what it will take to keep producing literacy-enhancing lessons.

### **Finding #1: Understanding the Common Core's Role in Social Studies**

The principal object the department is aiming to understand is the role of the Common Core State Standards in social studies. These standards were first adopted by the state in 2010, five years before this action research project began in 2015. They “are not meant to replace content standards in those areas but rather to supplement them” (California State Board of Education, 2013, p.2). The CCSS are focused on the role of literacy in the classroom and not a list of what students are expected to know, like the content standards. Standardized testing, like the Smarter Balanced, now focuses on students’ ability to understand passages in depth and write strong responses, not answer questions related to historical knowledge. This shift has impacted social studies teachers’ understanding of what they are supposed to be doing with their students.

The teachers in this department have yet to come to a full understanding of the role of the Common Core in history. This one round of action research was not sufficient. In fact, several teachers did not even realize that we were using the Common Core’s Literacy in History-Social Science standards in this action research process. Grace, a world history teacher, remarked, “we were practicing with English standards.” She was not alone in thinking that everything we had done was a simulation based off of the English Common Core standards. One of the U.S. history teachers, Sophia, made a similar comment, “so, what we were doing was for English, right?” Though only these two actually mentioned the English standards by name in this context, they were not alone in missing that we were working with the social studies standards.

### *Waiting for something*

A common theme that came up in the study is that social studies teachers are waiting for something to come, that we are not there yet. This is despite the fact that this action research project took place over a year after the full implementation of the CCSS (California Department of Education, 2014a). Sixty-two percent of the teachers interviewed alluded to the idea that the standards are not actually in place and we have to wait until that gets straightened out before really knowing what to do. Natalie, a world history teacher, had a couple of comments that drove this point home. First, when discussing the lack of training:

I think a lot of that (no training) is because social sciences isn't there yet and therefore it wouldn't do me any good to go to the conference on how they're introducing it in English without giving me an idea of what's going on. When it does get to social studies may be the district will have money to be able to send us to a specific training.

Second, when commenting on the future of literacy instruction in the department:

I think that our social studies department has probably done a pretty decent job of we know it's not here yet, but we need to start thinking about it and not everyone appreciates that. I know I've talked to people about whether they like it or not and they keep mentioning that we're not there yet, so then why do they keep mentioning this?

The idea that the standards are not set yet was also evident in the communications members of the action research team would send out. At the beginning of the school year an email came out talking about how we are waiting for new content standards. One email described the standards as being in a state of flux and another email referred to the latest social studies framework<sup>3</sup> for teaching as a set of upcoming standards. That is a minor error,

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<sup>3</sup> The state publishes frameworks for most subjects and they explain in detail ways teachers can go about implementing the standards in their courses. These frameworks are a valuable tool and the newest set in social studies will help in the transition to the CCSS. The frameworks are not, however, a new set of standards changing what is supposed to be taught or how it is supposed to be taught (California Department of Education, 2016).

but is indicative of the lack of a precise language commonly understood by all in the department. A similar confusion will come up with the term literacy, as described below.

An associated notion is that as students from younger grades work their way up to high school, then we will be more effective working with the Common Core. Those students, by that time, will be used to the increased reading and writing. This was discussed in the diagnostic stage meetings by the world history and U.S. history teams and revisited by the world history team in the evaluation phase meeting. Much of this belief stems from the teachers' experiences with their own children in elementary school. The feeder districts are doing a good job of pushing the Common Core and so once those kids make it to our school within five years or so Common Core-aligned instruction will go more smoothly.

In total, one third of the department reported on the final questionnaire that one of the things holding up their transition to the CCSS was that they are waiting for new standards. At the time of this writing, the state has a bill before the assembly (AB740) to authorize a new timeline for updating content standards in the state, but it does not specifically set a date yet for social studies. It is not even the law yet. There are no new social studies content standards on the horizon.

Another part of the puzzle is that the teachers are waiting for a standardized assessment that is at least four years away.<sup>4</sup> The Smarter Balanced test is administered in high school only to juniors and they take it in their English classes. It is the English department that has had extensive training in the CCSS and Smarter Balanced. This leaves the social studies teachers with the feeling that we are not being tested. Not having to worry

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<sup>4</sup> In March of 2016, the State Superintendent of Education revealed to the State Board of Education that a standardized test would be developed for social studies in California.

about a standardized test contributes to a key component of the problem- a lack of formal accountability.

When commenting on challenges in collaboration meetings during an interview, Natalie observed that, “you can go back in your room, close the door and never change unless there’s some sort of accountability. Now without the CST’s... our school may not be going anywhere at this point since social science doesn’t have the state assessment.”

Right at the beginning of the year, the department chair addressed the standardized test issue. In an email sent to the department, he admonished us not to let our guard down because the test is a few years out. Having now been a couple of years removed from the California Standards Tests, leadership at the school is cognizant of the need to keep pushing instruction forward even without the old system of accountability. The department will have to wait a few more years to figure out exactly what the next assessment looks like and how it affects their instruction.

#### *General lack of understanding*

This sense that the Common Core is not here yet for social studies is contributing to an overall lack of uncertainty about the standards. At the beginning of the study, respondents to the preliminary questionnaire reported that they had an understanding of the Common Core between “Barely” and “Somewhat”. Seventy-five percent of the interviewees would also state they had a similar degree of understanding using phrases such as “a passing knowledge,” “average,” “don’t feel that familiar with it,” and “moderately.”

Regardless of what the teachers said when directly responding to the question about their familiarity with the CCSS, all but two would reveal in later questions they were not that sure about the role of the Common Core in social studies. A couple of the teachers used

powerful imagery when talking about how well they understood the transition to the Common Core. Sophia was wondering what the Common Core is supposed to look like when someone comes into her room and added, “I have been hearing Common Core for the past few years and it’s just like murky water. It’s not clear.” This was particularly troubling to her, as she wants to grow as a teacher and tackle this new challenge.

Another teacher typically up for new challenges is James, a government teacher. He was commenting on his preparation for the interview and said, “I used the word nebulous when I was discussing how Common Core has worked and I think what I mean by that is it’s sort of this high cloud-level thing.” The Common Core is something he thinks social studies teachers have had difficulty applying to concrete lessons. Teachers would raise similar concerns in the collaboration meetings and in informal conversations. They just want models they can work with in class.

Not all teachers seemed unsure of what the CCSS are asking of them. Debra, a U.S. history teacher, has been working with the University of California’s Curriculum Integration Institute for about five years and feels that work has left her, “more familiar with [the Common Core] than the average non-English or math teacher.” Her ability to describe reading and writing instruction in her classes does back up that assessment. The overwhelming takeaway from the interviews, though, was that the teachers are indeed struggling with how to work with the CCSS. And, the teachers’ direct answers to this question are not the only evidence of this uncertainty.

### *Content versus literacy instruction*

Communications between the action research team members through email show that the CCSS for history are understood as something we share with English-Language Arts

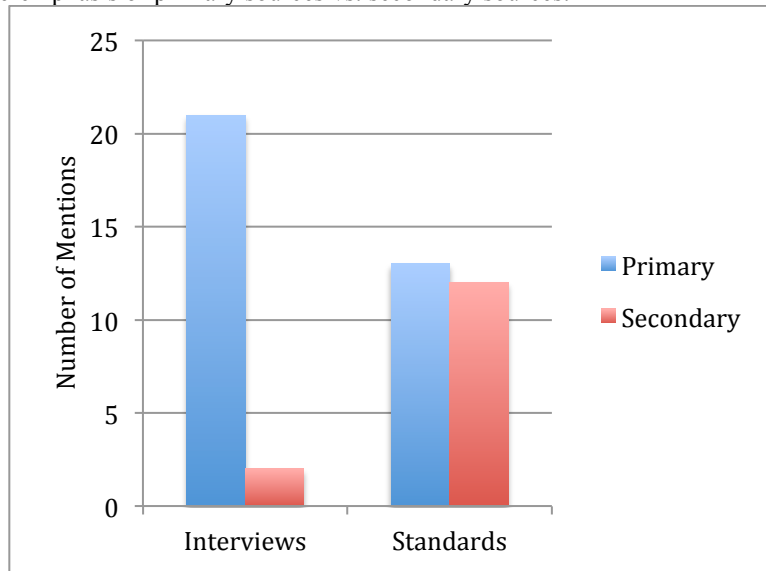


(ELA). While there is a lot of overlap, the standards are not identical. The key differences in the standards are those skills specific to social studies. Believing that the CCSS focus more on ELA risks missing important ideas that can help students in their understanding of social studies.

Another email sent just before a collaboration meeting talked about how the department is de-emphasizing content and elevating skills. Concern over the balance between content and literacy instruction could be seen in half of the interviews as well. Debra worried about hitting the right mix when commenting, “I need to stair-step in some of the literacy stuff that we’re doing because in some cases I sacrificed content to do more literacy stuff... I just don’t know if I made the right sacrifices.” She would also remark on how the lack of a standardized test deepens that feeling of being in the dark. Marlon, a world history teacher, argued for the need for traditional fact-based history instruction when he said, “You need content to be able to write, right? To build a paper you need to know what you’re writing about. So, you need to have the big points.”

By far the main tool these social studies teachers are using to bring in literacy instruction is the primary source. All of the interventions created for this project used multiple primary source documents and the term primary source came up repeatedly in every meeting. The emphasis on the primary source may be too strong as revealed in Figure 2. When the teachers talk about the CCSS, they think it means moving towards primary sources at the expense of the textbook. However, the wording of the actual Common Core’s Literacy in History-Social Science standards strikes a better balance than the teachers appear to realize.

Fig. 2 Teachers' overemphasis of primary sources vs. secondary sources.



A final indication that the teachers do not fully understand the role of literacy in the CCSS Literacy in History-Social Science standards can be seen in the responses to a question on the final questionnaire at the end of the project about what the teachers reported they discussed in their collaborative meetings. Only 46.7% of the teachers said they had covered “literacy” (an option given on the questionnaire) during these meetings. Given that the entire project was about developing lessons to meet the CCSS Literacy in History-Social Science standards, clearly something is amiss.

#### *Improvements in understanding the CCSS*

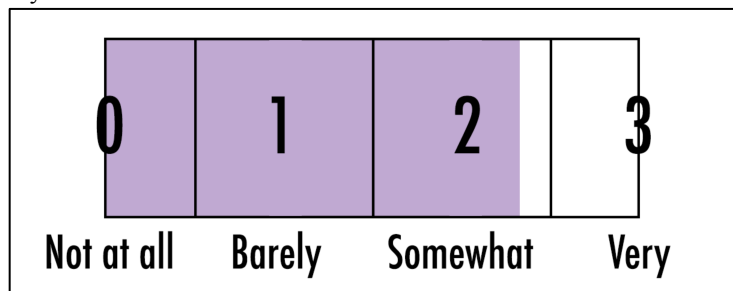
As far as an increased understanding of the role of the CCSS in social studies is concerned, there are several sources of evidence pointing towards progress. Not only did the teachers talk about this increased understanding in the meetings, they did in the interviews as well. Sophia, who had originally thought we were working with the English standards, said, “changing one major lesson... was good. It was very eye-opening and it wasn’t as hard

as I thought it was going to be...” James nicely tied in the increase in understanding with the power of reflection:

I think one thing that we got out of this as a group was ‘here's what the endgame is. This is what we want to be able to do or here's what we want students to be able to do. What assignment or project or task can we create that help students get there?’ I think it's okay. I think it helped us provide some insight into here is what maybe a Common Core project looks like. And then the analysis piece is always good because I don't think teachers do that enough- look back on their assignments and think ‘how did this go?’

Survey results from both questionnaires also confirmed the department was able to build a stronger understanding of the Common Core. From the preliminary questionnaire to the final questionnaire scores for familiarity with the Common Core improved (fig. 3), knowledge of lessons and standards as an obstacle dropped, and 86.7% of the teachers reported they are now reviewing their instructional practices, including writing. Though this project lasted only six months, it did start the teachers on a path towards increased ability to incorporate the Common Core into their lessons.

Fig. 3 How familiar do you now feel with the Common Core?



\*2.3 (Common Core familiarity scored 1.71 on the preliminary survey)

## **Finding #2: Forces Contributing to the Department’s Understanding of the CCSS**

This department is dealing with a variety of forces affecting their ability to understand the Common Core and create appropriate lessons meeting its expectations. Some of these forces contribute to this task. The department has a strong collaborative culture and teachers

can rely on each other for help. The teachers are also slowly getting clearer information on what is expected of them through this collaboration. They have also benefitted from the accountability embedded in the project- namely having to do things and report to their peers. The teachers are also benefiting from an optimistic sense that they can handle the challenge and are motivated to do so.

### *Collaborative culture*

One of the great strengths of this department is its well-developed collaborative culture. The course teams have been meeting together regularly for many years. A deep respect for each other was evident in the meetings. Once started, nearly everyone was on task the entire time, no disagreement over the direction to take was ever anything but professional, and the teachers would go do what they had promised. In the interviews, everyone talked about the benefits of collaboration in the department and any problems raised were minor. Debra did say, “it's often challenging with the people in our department [being] very involved in school. So it's very difficult to always have everybody in the room.” However, she went on to temper that by saying, “but I think overall we are as productive as possible with our time with the people in the room and we work well together and we listen to people's ideas well.” And, actually the attendance rate for all of the teachers during this project was 88%.

Most of the comments made about the collaboration mirrored what Grace said.

I think our project help me a lot when we worked together and I think it helped to pull everything that we're doing individually together. Because, then it's like ‘well with this great project we all bring our own part to it.’ Because alone it's like ‘well I did this little bit. So that's okay. And you did this bit. Okay, that's okay.’ But when you kind of make a lesson with everything combined to it, it's like a super lesson.

The collaborative work the teachers did for this project, and have done in the past, not only was a good example of the collective building of knowledge, but the teachers recognized this without prompting.

The department could work on making sure that everyone’s voice is heard. Sophia commented that, “I think [collaboration is] very helpful if everybody’s willing to contribute... if people acknowledged [having] to work together... because I don’t always see that.” Meeting observations did not show any purposeful non-engagement, but a count of individual contributions to group discussion in the meetings does show an imbalance in who is doing the talking (fig. 4). Overall, though, the department does a good job of working together to solve problems and the teachers do find this time to be useful (fig. 5).

Fig. 4 Individual contributions to group discussion by teacher, weighted for attendance

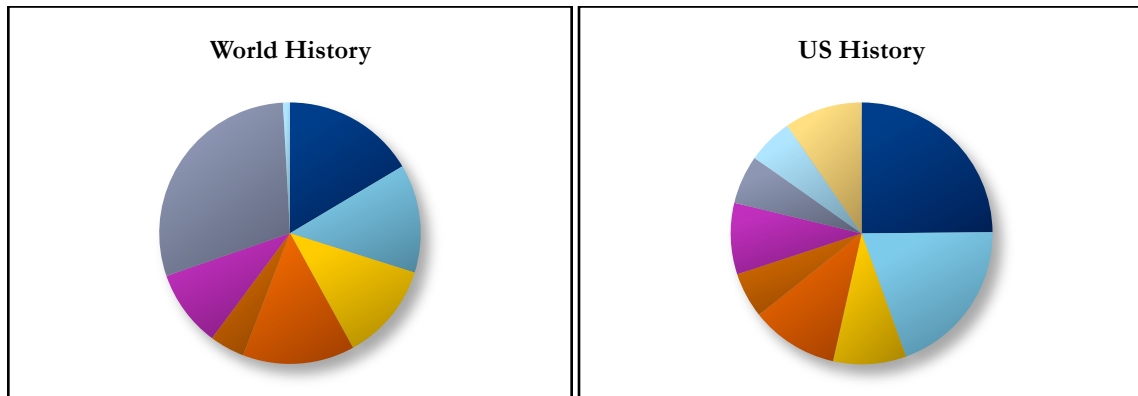
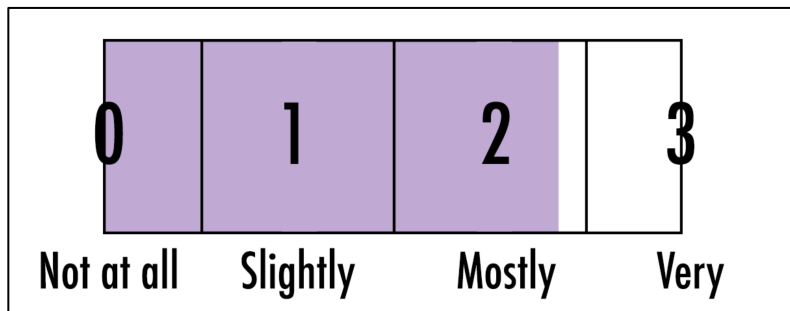


Fig. 5 How useful have you found the recent collaborations to be (during the action research project)?



\*2.33

This department has also benefitted from a clearer picture of the CCSS developed in collaboration. I did give the teachers all of the reading and writing standards expected in social studies and, as stated above, the teachers did review their current practices against these standards in the final phase with 95% of the reflection forms being turned in. The teachers were also given some sample lessons and the U.S. history and government teams even ended up using them in their interventions. Additionally, the teachers had a chance to hear their colleagues in the meetings talk about their understanding of the Common Core and give examples of the kinds of things they are doing in their classrooms. All of this adds up to the increased understanding of the CCSS in social studies laid out earlier.

#### *Accountability*

Another contributing force the department was able to benefit from was increased accountability. Currently, the teachers do not have to worry about any consequences for not implementing the Common Core. Being forced to work on a literacy-enhancing lesson during this project gave the teachers a push some were glad to get. About the collaboration during this project, Marlon said, “It makes us get an assignment down that uses [the CCSS]. A lot of teachers, if you don't force it upon them they'll keep on doing what they had to do. But because we have the meetings, we have to get the papers done.” Just by having to work with the others in the department and being expected to bring back a report on how your lesson went, the teachers felt compelled to take on this work on peer-pressure alone. They did not need an outside mandate. This is also partially supported by an increase in the teachers' reported sense of usefulness for the collaboration meetings during the action research project (Fig. 5) versus meetings held before the project.

*Motivation*

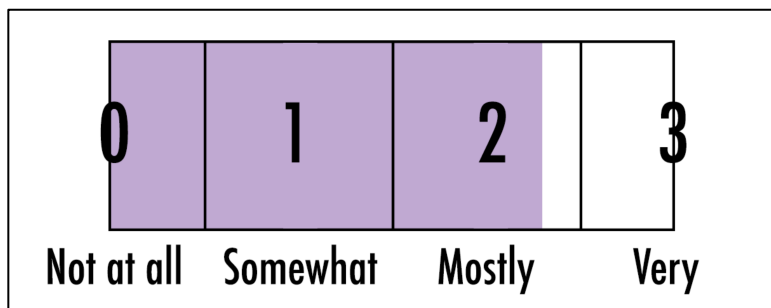
The final contributing force is the teachers' motivation to change. As revealed above, the teachers are willing to take on the Common Core and show no real sign of discouragement at the prospect of change. Dorothy made a comment that sums up the department's motivation well:

I still think we're moving towards Common Core where it's beyond what we have traditionally done. And, we have to be willing as a department to embrace the next stage and even if that includes technology, more primary sources, whatever it includes, I think our department will be up for the challenge.

Their motivation has persisted in the face of five years of uncertainty about the Common Core and no formal training to date. It is a sign that they can sustain a move towards increased literacy instruction if the other contributing forces continue to work in their favor.

This motivation is reflected in their responses to the survey question, "What is the likelihood you will stay intentionally focused on improving literacy instruction in your classes?" (Fig. 6). However, this does not mean that the department has committed to continuing an action research process as formal as the one in this study. In the evaluation phase meeting for U.S. history, the one teacher did question the need to keep the collaboration routine as structured as it was this year. It remains to be seen how faithful the department is to the use of action research cycles in the future.

Fig. 6 What is the likelihood you will stay intentionally focused on improving literacy instruction in your classes?



\*2.27

### **Finding #3: Forces Hindering the Department's Understanding of the CCSS**

Not all of the forces affecting the department's work are beneficial, however. The teachers in this department are having to deal with realities that are hindering their ability to implement quality CCSS-aligned lessons. They still do lack quite a bit of knowledge about how the standards can be implemented and, especially, to what degree the students are to perform. The teachers do not have adequate models of Common Core lessons of which to build off. To this point, they have not even had any access to outside experts or professional training programs to assist them. Finally, a point brought up repeatedly in the department is that they do not have the time to create these new lessons or the time to deliver them in class. Put together, these forces are making the transition to the Common Core an uncertain move and keeping them from changing much of their practice.

#### *Lack of knowledge*

The teachers in this department need help understanding how a few key components of the Common Core will fall into place for them. As previously covered, they are not sure about the future of the content standards, how they fit with the Common Core standards and when a standardized test will be created for them. Some of the teachers do not want to change a lot of their practice until that is cleared up.

This gets back to the issue of balancing content instruction with literacy instruction. On the final questionnaire, 80% of the teachers reported that they struggle with finding the time for the students to read and the same percent struggle with finding the time for them to write. Additionally, every teacher interviewed talked about the need to know more about writing instruction and worrying that is what they are doing the right way to go? With no



standardized assessment, the teachers have no direct outside feedback on how well they are preparing the students. Natalie lamented,

I'm a good writer but my weakness is trying to teach them to be good writers. I was never taught to be a good writer. I just am. So, I don't have any frame of reference for how to break down the process besides topic sentence and the basics. I'm actually not very good at writing strategies. It is something I actually need to work on...

The writing instruction in the department has some weaknesses. This was seen in the teachers' reflections about how the students did on the intervention lessons and in remarks made by the teachers themselves in the interviews. It is an area that is hindering Common Core-aligned instruction and breeding an uncertainty about how to move forward that is holding the department back.

In the collaborative meetings, teachers would also talk about how to modify their instruction for their special education students. This is a concern across the department. Debra wondered, "how do we adjust for our special education students? Because several of us teach collaborative classes<sup>5</sup> and just trying to adjust... for that population is a challenge." Sophia went into detail expressing her concern over teaching special education students:

I have one collaboration class and then some other [special education] students in my [college] prep classes. So, maybe a total of about 12 to 13 students and there are some who would struggle a lot. It would be very difficult even for them to understand what's expected of them because they already struggle with something that everybody is used to doing. Short answer [responses] are already very challenging for them to do and then having to defend it or elaborate or look for... bias being used. I don't really agree with special education students having to be expected to understand [the Common Core] and being assessed on how well they can perform at the same level as another student.

Cary further drove the point home:

We have mixed collaboration classes with special education. That's been mentioned a few times. How do we remain faithful to Common Core asking these tough

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<sup>5</sup> Collaborative classes are those in which a higher number of special education students will be placed, usually with an instructional aide.

overarching questions, pushing these kids to read more difficult texts and write at a certain level when you have one third of the class with special education kids? That's a challenge for sure. We're still trying to work that out. So scaffolding is always probably an issue. We haven't had that dialog yet. I think we should.

The worry about reaching special education students has been around for years in this department. The introduction of the Common Core is the latest wrinkle in this long-standing issue. Though the teachers would raise concerns about teaching these students often, no teacher ever mentioned any work they are doing with the special education department to address this. Not having access to outside resources for help with special education students, or even just in general, is the next hindering force.

#### *Lack of resources*

Only one of the teachers in this department, Grace, has had formal training in the Common Core and she described it as, "very vague." Three of the teachers mentioned the district literacy coach as a resource but none of them provided any details on what this coach had done to contribute to their understanding of the Common Core. The district's resources have been focused on English and math to this point. Social studies teachers across the district did begin a process to look at the new expectations for social studies instruction during the same school year as this study, but that had only meant one meeting by study's end. That meeting was more about the basics of the new state social studies framework and some examples of lessons teachers in the district have. If the district does become a stronger leader in professional development in the Common Core's role in social studies, then this hindering force may become less problematic.

## *Time*

The last of the main forces hindering this department's efforts is time. For the teachers this means time to change their lessons, time to incorporate literacy instruction in class, and time to grade. Natalie spoke of the time it takes to change her curriculum when saying, "I would be much more amenable [to changing] if you're going to offer me help and time and collaboration to develop my own program." Debra talked about trying to, "find adequate time to allow students to process... with 54 minute periods, how long of a text can be looked at... before the bell rings. There's always that time crunch." When it comes to grading, Grace was direct, "there's a reason I'm not an English teacher." That worry about having the time to grade was echoed by 86.7% of the teachers on the final questionnaire and something that was brought up in the meetings.

## **Summary**

The social studies department in this study undertook action research to develop a better understanding of how they can match their instruction to the expectations of the Common Core. That action research process did result in the teachers developing a greater understanding of the role of the CCSS in social studies, however there is room to grow. The first finding of the study is that the teachers in this department do not have a complete understanding of the Common Core in social studies. This incomplete grasp showed through their sense that the standards are not set yet, through a general uncertainty about what the standards ask, and through the struggle some teachers are having balancing content and literacy instruction.

Forces exist which are contributing to the teacher's understanding. This is the second finding of the study. These contributing forces are the department's strong collaborative culture, the accountability that came with participating in the study, and the teachers' motivation to grow. By honing these forces, the members of this department can grow more comfortable delivering literacy-enhancing instruction in line with the CCSS.

However, the third finding of this study is that there also exist forces that are hindering the department's ability to move towards stronger Common Core-aligned instruction. The teachers lack adequate knowledge about the CCSS. This includes both a knowledge of the standards themselves and how to implement them in an actual classroom setting. Furthermore, there has been a lack of resources for the teachers to rely on. This includes training, materials, and expert assistance. The last hindering force is time. The teachers do not have enough time to develop new lessons that focus on literacy skills and they do not think they have enough time to carry out such lessons, including assessing the student's performance.

## CHAPTER 5

This qualitative action research study sought to address the problem of inadequate preparation for the introduction of the Common Core in a high school social studies department. This study is timely because it fell into a window of time between the *de jure* implementation of the Common Core and its *de facto* implementation. Though the Common Core has been in place for at least three years at the time of this writing, it is not faithfully being implemented by every social studies department in the state. This action research project was designed to move one department closer to full implementation and to identify why that was not happening more quickly.

This study identified three main findings: the incomplete understanding of the role of the Common Core by this department, the forces contributing to the teachers understanding, and the forces hindering their understanding. I created a model to explain how these forces are impacting the department's development of better Common Core-aligned instruction using the concept of an activity system in expansive learning (Engeström, Miettinen, Punamäki-Gitai, & International Congress for Research on Activity Theory, 1999; Engeström & Sannino, 2010).

Before getting to any recommendations, some limitations do exist in this study that need to be considered. The main limitation is that this action research project only completed one cycle during the course of the study. More cycles are necessary to see any real growth. This study also did not include any classroom observations and therefore relies entirely on the self-reporting by the teachers. Also, this is only one social studies department. It is not a perfect example of every other in the state.

However, something can be learned from what this department is going through. Teachers can develop their professional practice through collaboration. It must be systematic and include some type of accountability structure. Teachers need to stick to a process like action research in order to reap the full benefits of collaboration. Outside assistance is necessary too, though. Efforts should be made at identifying resources that can help teachers move along more quickly than if they are working just by themselves.

As far as future research is concerned, this study offers two areas at which to look. First, when the state of California finally does begin standardized testing for social studies again more data will be available that will allow for an evaluation of the contributing and hindering forces at play in this study. We will be able to see if this department's (and similarly situated departments') collaborative work did result in greater student performance. Second, before that assessment appears there is an opportunity to study how teachers hold themselves accountable to each other without any outside mandate. Such work can go far in helping decentralized organizations stay on top of change while maintaining distributed leadership.

### **Timeliness of the Study**

This action research project took place within a window of time between the implementation of a new instructional system, the Common Core, and a professional development regiment to handle the change in social studies. This department has only begun to get help from the district and at the time of this writing that had not been much. This window allowed the study to look at how a group of professionals can handle major change without any outside assistance. As it is, the Common Core is still in its early stages and accompanying assessments, like the Smarter Balanced, have only recently been rolled out.

This study has shown two things that need to be addressed with the implementation of the Common Core and any future initiatives. First, communication on the part of decision makers throughout the education hierarchy was not effective in getting these social studies teachers to understand what the Common Core means to them. And, this is not a department or a school with a history of low performance. The implementation plan in the state purposely delegated much of the responsibility for awareness and training to the counties and districts (California Department of Education, 2014a) so as not to make the transition a top-down mandate. However, the loose-coupling (Weick, 1976) in education has resulted in widely different levels of understanding about the Common Core in social studies. Models for good instruction have been appearing, but not everyone knows about them. In the case of this department, that has led to confusion and uncertainty.

A second related problem is that without any accountability there has not been adequate motivation to make the change. This affects the teachers in two ways. One, they can continue their current practices without any consequence. They may not even be adverse to change, but the hard work to alter their instruction can be put off indefinitely. There are always things that get in the way. Two, some teachers do not want to jump into large-scale change only to find out they will be expected to do something entirely different when a standardized assessment finally comes. The problem with this approach is that once the test comes the teachers' instructional techniques become instantly outdated and that will show through lower student performance.

This action research project has illustrated the impact the current shift to the Common Core has had on a social studies department. The way in which awareness was raised about how the change impacts social studies led to confusion within the department.

Also, not having an accountability system to spur that change has resulted in a slow adoption of the type of instruction that the Common Core calls for. There is still time for these effects to be mitigated as a new social studies assessment across the state is implemented.

### **Findings Discussion**

The teachers in this department do not fully understand how the Common Core is to work within their classes. This lack of clarity can be seen in the fact that many are waiting for more information before committing to change, they expressed unease about the standards through the study, and they are unsure how to balance literacy instruction with the content they have always been teaching. Their lack of understanding was the first finding of the study.

Debra, a U.S. history teacher, described the different standards currently out there as, “a set of moving gears that aren't quite meshing.” She was referring to the different sets of standards that teachers in the department hear about. No one has ever taken the time to articulate what each means and how social studies teachers should incorporate them. The standards most familiar to the teachers are the state’s content standards. They have been in place since 1998 and detail the subjects to be taught. These standards were tested on the previous state assessment, the California Standards Test. As the Common Core standards were introduced, some teachers wondered whether this meant that the content standards would be replaced by new Common Core standards for social studies. At least one teacher specifically mentioned in the interviews, and three others hinted, that that was something they were thinking.



Further complicating the standards issue was that the department chair introduced everyone to the National Council for the Social Studies' C3 framework at the beginning of the school year. This document was produced by a non-governmental organization that mirrors the goals of the Common Core with a heavy focus on the disciplinary tools of social studies. It is a valuable resource, but not mandated by the state. What the state has just updated is its social studies framework. This framework is a highly detailed document that was built using concepts from the C3 and Common Core with California's content standards in mind. It helps teachers with how to teach the standards. As a statewide social studies assessment approaches, the state framework will be the most reliable guide for how teachers can modify their instruction.

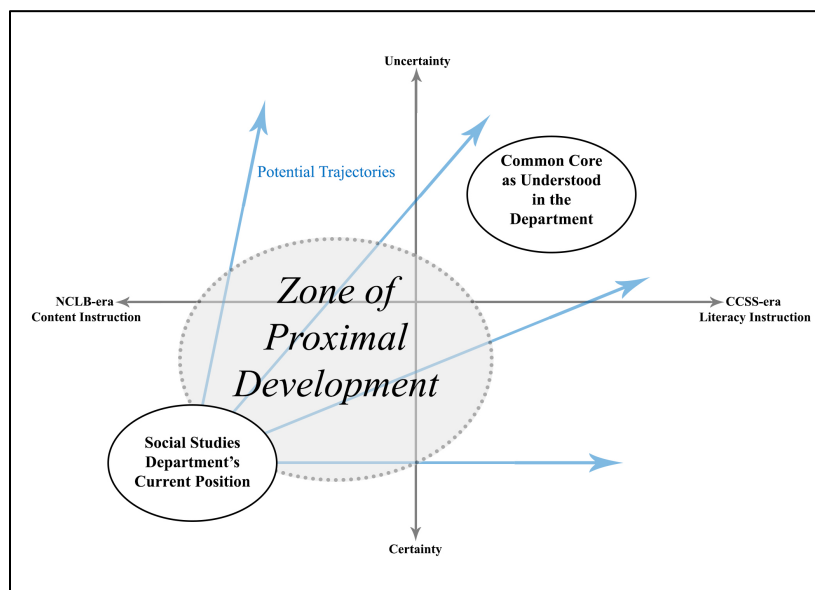
Studying the state framework will also help teachers balance literacy and content instruction. The two should not be seen as opposing goals. Ideally, skilled-based literacy instruction occurs through the medium of the content. One should not be sacrificed for the other. Figuring out what is important to cover in class and what can be set aside is always a challenge. That was the case before the Common Core. Because information about what the Common Core means to social studies has been lacking, the teachers have been thinking that everything would become about reading and writing skills to the detriment of historical knowledge. That is not the case and a review of the new state framework should ease that fear.

Engeström (1999) says that contradictions are the engine of change. The contradictions the department is struggling with are shaping the direction they are heading. The biggest is dealing with the uncertainty of the Common Core. As established above, the teachers are not fully aware of what the Common Core means for them. In the face of this

uncertainty, the default position is to rely on what they know and have always been doing. Three-fourths of the teachers in this department came to the profession after No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was enacted and were acclimated to the expectations of the CST- a content heavy test. The default position in this department is to teach as many facts as possible and often this means moving through the courses' timeline very slowly. Two world history teachers did not get to their intervention lesson until well into February. It was designed to be administered in December.

Also, as mentioned above, there is tension between how to balance traditional content-based instruction with a new emphasis on literacy-based instruction. These two contradictions, certainty versus uncertainty and content instruction versus literacy instruction define the field this department is working in. As seen in figure 7, my preliminary model for what is happening with the department uses the tension these contradictions generate to create a two-dimensional plane defining where the department can move over the next couple of years.

Fig. 7 Preliminary model for the department's expansive learning



The teachers in this department are starting this journey in the lower left quadrant of the model. Their practice is based on what they have developed over the last decade under the expectations embedded in NCLB. However they are motivated to change. This motivation can be seen in the results from the final questionnaire. The teachers reported that they are “Mostly” motivated to continue intentional, focused work on implementing the Common Core in their classes. Also, the teachers in all of the meetings were attentive, positive, and working throughout.

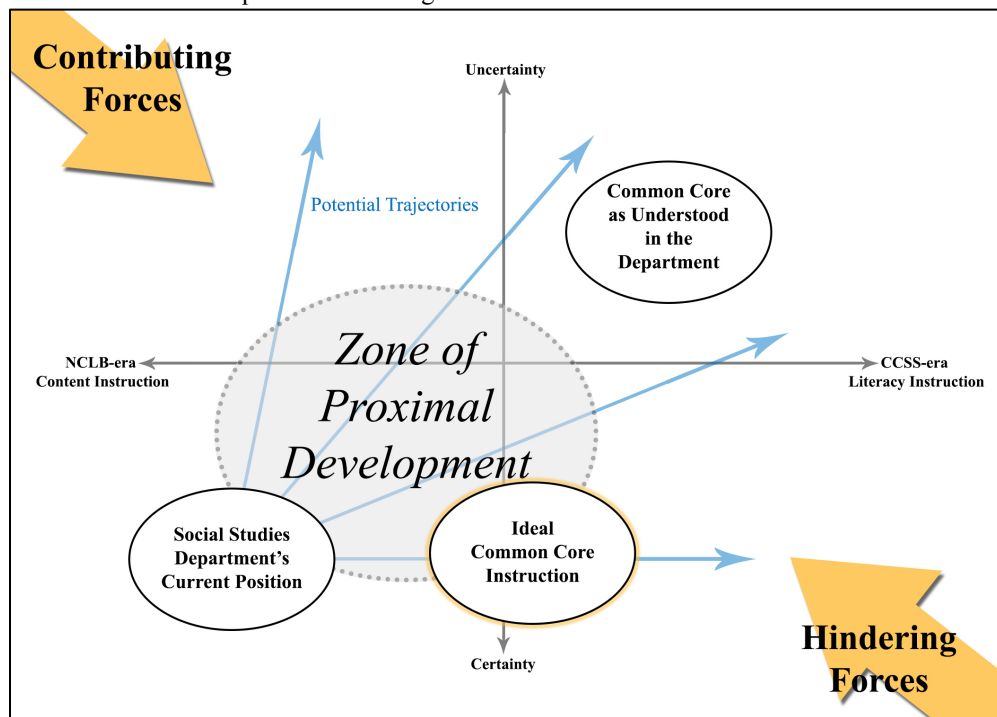
Vygotskiĭ (1978) defined the distance between where a learner is at and where that learner can reach with help as the zone of proximal development. The object of learning in this study was the role of the Common Core in social studies. In the preliminary model (Fig. 7) this is presented in the upper right quadrant. The Common Core is not fully understood and, as presented above, believed to focus on literacy at the expense of content. However, once properly understood, an ideal place for the department to end up in understanding the Common Core is to find a good balance between content instruction and literacy instruction.

The department began to navigate this zone of proximal development by using action research. The goal of the action research project was to develop an intervention (Common Core-aligned lesson) in each core subject that teachers could use as a model for future literacy-enhanced instruction. The project started in October 2015 and ended in April 2016. The reason for using action research was to build on the collective knowledge of the teachers in the department and develop their professional practice in-house.

When applying the contributing and hindering forces to the model, their effect on how the department can move towards well-understood Common Core practice can be

seen (Fig. 8). The contributing forces help the department move towards a proper balance of content and literacy instruction that the teachers competently carry out. These forces push the department towards increased certainty and increased literacy instruction. The hindering forces push in the opposite direction. They create uncertainty and keep the department from changing practices. Adequately addressing the hindering forces can morph them into contributing forces that get the department to where it wants to be. Addressing the hindering forces can actually yield greater benefits than improving the contributing forces (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005; Lewin, 1947).

Figure 8 Model for what the department is facing



### Reflecting on the “Mess” of Action Research

I came into this project concerned about how I would manage my role as a participant-observer. Coghlan and Brannick (2005) advise of the necessity of managing the political

aspects of relationships when conducting action research in your own organization. Early on I could sense that some of the teachers were concerned about what I was ultimately looking for in my study. It was my relationships with my peers that took most of the work. I did not have to do much at all to assuage any doubts in my supervisors.

Delving into an organization's culture and looking for signs of meaningful change can be a risky act (Schein, 2010). Even addressing the most basic questions can raise eyebrows (Coghlan & Brannick, 2005). One teacher specifically asked me if I was really studying something other than what I was telling them about. He, along with a couple of other teachers, was never quite ecstatic about the project, but did agree to be a part of it. In the end, every teacher found something valuable to take away from doing this and nobody expressed any concern about the findings.

I spent time addressing concerns about what I was doing at every meeting we held. I also repeatedly assured everyone that all responses and sources of evidence would remain anonymous. Additionally, at every meeting I would reiterate that the study was about the department as a whole and not about individual teachers. I had some help in getting this message reinforced by the course team leads who would say similar things at the meetings I did not attend.

In the end, managing my role as both a teacher in the study and the researcher conducting the study was not the most trying aspect of the project. Getting the teachers to move seamlessly through each stage was a challenge. My meticulously laid plan did not unfold as scripted. Cook (2009) discusses the role of mess in action research and specifically how one makes sense of the work. An overlapping issue raised by Engeström & Sannino

(2010) is that the neat layout of steps in expansive learning do not always progress as planned. I will address how the steps unfolded in this project first.

*“Messy” steps*

The diagnostic stage did not work out the way I had intended. I wanted to make sure that the teachers were taking their time analyzing how their current practices were matching up to the expectations of the Common Core. That did not happen. I created a form for the teachers to list lessons they were already doing that matched individual Common Core standards (Appendix G). My goal was to compile everything the teachers said and return to them a list of what their course team was doing. Using that list, the teachers were to then identify weak spots that they could address when planning their intervention lessons. Only the U.S. history course team provided me with the forms in a timely manner. However, even they did not use that information when deciding what lesson they were going to go forward with.

What ended up happening across all four course teams was that the teachers selected or created an intervention lesson designed to improve literacy instruction without adequately diagnosing where their weaknesses were. It is possible that each lesson done for this study addressed the exact elements of the Common Core that the teachers have already been covering. My intent was to tackle something new. There is no way of knowing whether that happened.

The planning, intervention, and evaluation stages did go more smoothly. At each stage, the teachers went through the protocol I had developed and did have the necessary work done from earlier stages to make their work worthwhile. One issue that did arise from the intervention to the evaluation was how long it took two of the world history teachers to

conduct their lessons. This lag did reduce the amount of discussion during the final evaluation stage collaboration meeting, but not to the point of rendering the meeting useless. These teachers did also eventually turn in their reflections on the lesson, which matched, in substance, much of what everyone else had found.

When it came to my analysis of what had occurred during the action research project, I used a three-layered approach (Appendix D). I meshed the cycles of action research with the steps in expansive learning (Engeström et al., 1999). I also looked for evidence of professional learning identified by Paavola and Hakkarainen (2005) and used Schein's (2010) levels of culture analysis to look for signs of double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1974) or second-order change (Watzlawick et al., 1974) in the teachers' approach to Common Core-aligned instruction.

#### *“Messy” sense making*

However my actual process for coming up with the model for what is happening (Fig. 8) and my organization of the data into three main findings was done completely intuitively. This is where the real “mess” according to Cook (2009) happened. I realized that developing a picture for what was going on in the department would take something more than the mechanical process laid out in my original plan for analysis (Appendix D). Going back to expansive learning, I thought about how Engeström et al. (1999) defines an activity system and how that applied to the work of this social studies department. That is when the model came to me.

Though the meaning I have made out of this department's struggle cannot be traced in a linear fashion back through each step I took, it is a result of the deliberate analysis I described above. I also collected the data I used for that analysis systematically (Maxwell,

2013; Merriam, 2009). While I am struggling to feel confident about the scientific rigor underlying my findings like the researchers described in Cook (2009), I did draw my conclusions from data that was collected using piloted survey questionnaires and interview protocols, targeted observation protocols, and primary source documents from the teachers. I triangulated as much of the data as possible from both different data sources and different teachers' responses. All evidence with the potential of supporting or refuting the findings was analyzed within the context of my three-layered analysis (Appendix D), which was created using key concepts in the action research and professional development literature. My model (Fig. 8) did just pop in my head, but after all the technical work was complete.

The "mess" in this action research project manifested in two ways. First, the teachers did not necessarily go through each step in a complete, systematic fashion. Each of them has their own work to do, schedules to follow, and responsibilities to attend. I do not fault any of them for the incomplete diagnostic stage. The real day-to-day work of schools is fluid and dynamic. It would be unrealistic to expect that everything that took place in this project was carefully choreographed beforehand.

The second way in which "mess" appeared in this project was through the analysis and sense making of what the teachers were experiencing. My three findings and visual model for how they interact did not logically follow from my three-layered approach as if they were the result of a mathematical equation. Though my contributing forces and hindering forces metaphor is in line with Lewin's (1947) force-field theory, I was not actively thinking about his work when I came up with the idea. I was more interested in what can help the teachers come to a more certain understanding of the Common Core's role in social studies. From there I thought about what is causing uncertainty and that is how the two arrows at opposite



ends of the model were introduced. My understanding of the department's experience grew organically, though it was grounded in the research and analysis I had been doing all along.

### **Limitations**

This study has three main limitations to consider before any attempt to apply the findings to different contexts. First, the action research process was limited to one cycle. That was not enough time to measure any actual growth in the department's understanding of the Common Core. Second, the study relied heavily on the self-reporting of the teachers, as there were no classroom observations. No direct evidence exists of the literacy-focused instruction that took place in the intervention phase. Third, this study involved only 17 teachers in a specific setting. Trying to extrapolate the results out to all high school social studies teachers in the state would be inappropriate.

#### *One cycle*

Action research involves continuous cycles of diagnosing, planning, intervening, and evaluating. Growth happens over long periods of time as each cycle builds off of the previous one. This study took place over a period of about six months and involved only one complete cycle. The teachers are using their evaluations to inform their next diagnosis for next year, but that is outside the scope of this study. The findings presented here, therefore, only represent a small sample of the work they have been doing over recent years to understand the role of the Common Core in their discipline. While there are signs that the teachers began to develop a clearer picture of how Common Core-style instruction can work for them, it should not be looked at as solid evidence of growth.

### *Lack of classroom observation*

Classroom observations were not included in the study because it was determined it would be too difficult to carry out in the allotted timeframe and several of the teachers in the department would not have agreed to it. The lack of classroom observations did make it difficult to get a clear picture of what went on when the actual instruction took place. The teachers did discuss what they did in their reflections and at the evaluation meetings. However, these accounts relied completely on memory and were filtered through the teacher's perceptions of what was occurring and what the students were doing. The teachers had made comments in interviews that were not entirely backed up by the observations of the meetings (how much time was spent on a prompt in U.S. history and how often teachers were absent). It stands to reason that similar incongruences would have come up when looking at classroom recordings.

### *A small sample*

The last limitation that needs to be considered is that this was only one social studies department in one suburban high school. This school is not atypical for its size and location (Appendix A), but is still only one school. The views and experiences of 17 teachers should not count as proof that this is happening in every social studies department across the state. The forces that have created this department's trouble with adopting the Common Core are affecting many teachers across the state. However, to argue that the recommendations in this study could be enacted wholesale across California's high schools is wrong. The ideas to consider presented here do have merit, but should be studied within the context they are to be applied.

## **Recommendations**

This department, and those in a similar position, would benefit from strengthening the contributing forces identified as well as reducing the impact of the hindering forces. The most important aspects of the problem to work on would be collaboration, accountability, and formal professional development. Collaboration among the teachers needs to be ongoing, structured, and focused on specific goals. Within this collaborative routine, some type of internal accountability system needs to be developed to keep everyone on track. The teachers should also look for any opportunity for outside guidance they can get. Much can be accomplished working together, but if everyone is still missing some critical information, the department as a whole can never fully reach its potential.

### *Collaboration*

For collaboration to be successful, and to be faithful to the action research process, the teachers must keep their work moving forward. Too often attempts at professional growth end up being one shot bids at change without any follow-up or systematic plan to work on that change over an extended period of time. The teachers in this department have experienced a history of revolving initiatives that are hyped, tried, and forgotten in less than one school year. This haphazard approach to professional growth breeds a dispirited attitude about change. It hinders the ability of teachers to embrace new initiatives that may actually be worth their time.

From the perspective of action research, the teachers jump from planning stage to planning stage without spending any real time diagnosing the problem and then reflecting on how their intervention worked. Collaboration can help the individual teachers in the department learn how to incorporate the expectations of the Common Core if it involves an

intentional effort to bridge the cycles of interventions. The evaluation of the previous cycle should inform the diagnosis and plan for the next intervention. This has not been happening regularly outside of this study. Once the department gets into the habit of actively working through each stage, then the teachers will begin to see that their professional development work really is paying off.

### *Accountability*

The teachers also need to be fully engaged in their collaborative work if it is to be successful. Some type of accountability is needed to ensure that everybody is doing his or her part. Such accountability does not need to be in the form of a standardized test or a part of their formal employee evaluations. In this study it was peer pressure at most that pushed everyone to keep doing the work. For the most part just having a form to fill out and talk about at the meetings was enough to get teachers to think about how the Common Core fits in their classroom. It should not be difficult for teachers to develop a system among themselves to spur everyone to keep moving along. Waiting for an outside mandate would slow progress and threaten buy-in.

### *Formal professional development*

Collaboration by itself is productive, but much more can be done with outside help. The teachers should avail themselves of every opportunity for formal professional development that comes along. Programs have been developed across the state to help social studies teachers transition to the Common Core. These include everything from prepackaged lessons on the Internet to actual training sessions by fulltime professionals. Such programs are not widely publicized in every part of the state, but they do exist. Part of the push behind the Common Core is to get students to take an active part in their own learning. One way to

help students become more willing partners in their own education is for teachers to model that proactive approach. If teachers just sit back and wait for something to be handed to them, they undercut the message that students should be pursuing their own learning. Change is difficult, but it is easier to manage when you are in the driver's seat.

### **Future Research**

The real test of how high school social studies departments in California are handling the transition to the Common Core will be seen when the standardized assessment begins to be administered. The impact of the contributing and hindering forces will become clear when the test results start rolling in. A similar study to this one at that time can confirm how well departments like the one in this study are meeting the expectations of the Common Core.

Prior to the introduction of a standardized assessment is a window in which to study another phenomenon in this context. How teachers can hold themselves accountable to change without any outside pressure. As mentioned above, the only real pressure exerted on the teachers in this study was peer pressure. Figuring out how teachers can develop accountability structures within their own collaborative routines can go a long way in promoting a more democratic, ground-up approach to improved instruction.

### **Conclusion**

This action research project involved a group of 17 teachers in four core course subjects, world history, U.S. history, government, and economics, developing a better understanding of how the Common Core will impact their instruction from now on. This

social studies department, like many others in the state, has not had any formal training in how the Common Core's emphasis on literacy skills will work in their classes. Due to this lack of training, in-house action research was selected as the best approach to their professional development. Building off the collective knowledge of each other, the teachers went through a cycle of inquiry designed to identify a problem, model possible solutions or lessons, intervene in their classrooms with Common Core-aligned lessons, and evaluate how it all worked out.

In studying how the action research project worked for the department, I asked the following questions:

1. What is the process of developing a set of Common Core State Standards literacy lessons in a social studies department?

A. How do teachers respond (motivated, discouraged, etc.) to the need to incorporate more literacy instruction in their classes?

B. How do teachers collectively select the literacy strategies they will incorporate into social studies content courses?

C. To what degree, if any, do teachers report that the department's collaboration meetings helped them improve their literacy instruction?

D. What forces are contributing to their understanding of the Common Core's role in social studies and what forces are hindering their understanding?

Three main findings emerged from this study. First, the teachers do not have a complete understanding of the role of the Common Core in social studies. They seem to be waiting for new standards or an assessment before committing to change. They also have not had access to clear information about how the Common Core actually applies to their

pedagogy and specifically how to balance content and literacy instruction. Second, certain forces are contributing to their understanding of the Common Core. These are the strong collaborative culture these teachers have developed, the accountability that was embedded in this project (it got them actually work on the problem), and they are motivated to change. Third, there are forces that are hindering their understanding of the Common Core. These teachers lack adequate information about the Common Core and literacy instruction. This also includes a lack of resources and models on which to draw. They also do not feel like they have the time to make this transition work within their current schedules.

The practical application of these findings for high school social studies in California is that the hindering forces need to be mitigated. Administrators should be aware of the need for formal professional development in the Common Core for social studies teachers. It is not enough to wait for a new state assessment to come and then decide what needs to be changed. Enough information and resources exist to be able to get these teachers started. With this extra work will come the need for the time to get things done. That part of the problem cannot be ignored.

These findings also open up further questions for research. When the state does implement a standardized assessment for social studies, an evaluation of the model (fig. 8) I presented can be done. When student achievement data starts coming in, then the impact of the contributing and hindering forces can be reliably observed. Until then, research can be done on how teachers can hold themselves accountable when no one else is. Right now is the perfect time to watch teachers work collaboratively among themselves on change without having an outside force mandate it. What structures do they put in place to hold themselves accountable to each other?

Finally, my action research project did help the teachers in this social studies department begin to create a more complete picture for how their instruction can match the expectations of the Common Core. It also showed them that they have the ability to do much of this work on their own. Outside help will come eventually, but they can go far on their own. My biggest concern in going through with this project was that the teachers took away more from this work than they gave. I do believe that happened.



## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

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Appendix I: Survey Results

**Appendix A: Characteristics of the Site**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>School Enrollment</b>	<b>Percent of Students</b>	<b>Percent of Community Residents</b>	<b>Percent of State Population</b>
American Indian or Alaska Native	13	0.40%	0.70%	1.00%
Asian	271	7.90%	10.40%	13.00%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	28	0.80%	0.30%	0.40%
Filipino	120	3.50%		
Hispanic or Latino	1,478	43.00%	34.90%	37.60%
Black or African American	468	13.60%	9.20%	6.20%
White	917	26.70%	42.70%	40.10%
Two or More Races	126	3.70%	5.40%	4.90%
None Reported	15	0.40%		
<i>Total Number</i>	<b>3,436</b>		<b>171,386</b>	<b>38,431,393</b>
<b>Special Categories</b>			Community	State
English Learners	79	2.30%		
Free/Reduced Price Meals	1,188	34.60%		
Median Household Income			\$77,835	\$61,094
Percent Living Below Poverty Level			6.90%	15.90%
Source: Ed Data, California; U.S. Census Bureau				

## Appendix B: Data Collection Methods by RQ

Research Question	Data Collection Method
1. What is the process of developing a Common Core State Standards literacy curriculum in a social studies department?	Document collection of meeting agendas, minutes, resources used, and lessons developed. Interviews of a stratified random sample of teachers pulled from each course team covering perceptions on the meetings, lesson planning, lesson execution, and general beliefs about literacy instruction. Observations of collaborative meetings with focus on how resources are selected, how equal participation is, and how much buy-in is expressed.
A. How do teachers respond (motivated, discouraged, etc.) to the need to incorporate more literacy instruction in their classes?	Interviews of a stratified random sample of teachers pulled from each course team covering perceptions on the meetings, lesson planning, lesson execution, and general beliefs about literacy instruction. Observations of collaborative meetings with focus on how resources are selected, how equal participation is, and how much buy-in is expressed.
B. How do teachers decide which literacy strategies they will incorporate into social studies content courses?	Document collection of meeting agendas, minutes, resources used, and lessons developed. Observations of collaborative meetings with focus on how resources are selected, how equal participation is, and how much buy-in is expressed.
C. To what degree do teachers report that the collaboration meetings helped them improve their literacy instruction?	Survey via questionnaire about current literacy instruction practices before and after the AR cycle. Interviews of a stratified random sample of teachers pulled from each course team covering perceptions on the meetings, lesson planning, lesson execution, and general beliefs about literacy instruction. Observations of collaborative meetings with focus on how resources are selected, how equal participation is, and how much buy-in is expressed.
D. What forces are contributing to their understanding of the Common Core's role in social studies and what forces are hindering their understanding?	Document collection of meeting agendas, minutes, resources used, and lessons developed. Survey via questionnaire about current literacy instruction practices before and after the AR cycle. Interviews of a stratified random sample of teachers pulled from each course team covering perceptions on the meetings, lesson planning, lesson execution, and general beliefs about literacy instruction. Observations of collaborative meetings with focus on how resources are selected, how equal participation is, and how much buy-in is expressed.

## Appendix C: Preliminary Survey Instrument

### Survey of Literacy Practices in Social Studies

This survey is designed to gather information about literacy instruction in your social studies department and identify opportunities for aligning practices with Common Core expectations. Your responses will aid in the development of an action plan to improve students' ability to understand social studies content across all courses.

#### Section One: Teaching Experience

1. How many years have you been teaching social studies?

- Up to 2    3-5    6-10    11-15    16-20    20-30    31+

2. How many years have you been teaching social studies at this school?

- Up to 2    3-5    6-10    11-15    16-20    20-30    31+

3. What subjects do you currently teach?

*(Mark all that apply)*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> World History                | <input type="checkbox"/> Honors World History |
| <input type="checkbox"/> U.S. History                 | <input type="checkbox"/> A.P. U.S. History    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> U.S. Government              | <input type="checkbox"/> A.P. U.S. Government |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economics                    | <input type="checkbox"/> A.P. Economics       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psychology                   | <input type="checkbox"/> A.P. Psychology      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain) _____ |   |

Section Two: Literacy Strategies

4. In a typical week, how much time do you think students in your classes spend reading instructional texts (e.g. textbook, primary source documents)?

(a) In class...

0-30min.   30-60min.   60-90min.   90-120min.   120+min.

(b) For homework...

0-30min.   30-60min.   60-90min.   90-120min.   120+min.

5. In a typical week, how much time do you think students in your classes spend writing?

(a) Expository pieces...

0-30min.   30-60min.   60-90min.   90-120min.   120+min.

(b) Creative pieces...

0-30min.   30-60min.   60-90min.   90-120min.   120+min.

6. In a typical week, how many times do students write pieces of the following lengths:

Less than a paragraph	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6+
One paragraph	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6+
One page	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6+
Two or more pages	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 6+

7. Which of the following types of assessment do you use for reading comprehension throughout the school year?

(Mark all that apply)

- Multiple Choice
- Free Response
- Journaling
- Oral Discussions
- Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_
- True-False
- Summarizing
- Creative Projects
- None

Section Three: Professional Development

8. How many formal training sessions for literacy have you attended in the past two years?

- None
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6+

9. How long was the last training session for literacy you attended?

- 45min or less
- 60min
- 90min
- 120min
- 4hrs
- 8hrs
- I have never attended any literacy training

10. Where have the literacy training sessions you have attended been held?

*(Mark all that apply)*

- School Site During School Day
- School Site Outside of School Day
- District Office
- Union Office
- College Campus

Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

I have never attended any literacy training

11. How useful have you found these literacy training sessions to be?

Never attended any       Not at all       Slightly       Mostly       Very

12. In what areas have you changed your practices because of these trainings?

*(Mark all that apply)*

Reading       Instructional Techniques

Writing       Planning

Assessment       Goal Setting

Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

I have not changed any practices because of literacy training

#### Section Four: Collaboration Meetings

13. How many collaboration meetings with teachers of your same subject have you attended in the past two years?

None       1       2       3       4       5       6+

14. How long was the last collaboration meeting with peers you attended?

45min or less       60min       90min       120min       4hrs       8hrs

15. What topics do you cover in these collaboration meetings?

*(Mark all that apply)*

Literacy

Planning

Assessment

Goal Setting

Instructional Techniques

Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

16. How useful have you found these collaborations to be?

Not at all

Slightly

Mostly

Very

17. In what areas have you changed your practices because of these collaboration meetings?

*(Mark all that apply)*

Reading

Instructional Techniques

Writing

Planning

Assessment

Goal Setting

Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

I have not changed any practices because of literacy training

18. How often does your group follow up on goals set at these meetings?

Never

Seldom

Sometimes

Usually

Always

19. How familiar do you feel with the Common Core literacy standards for history?

Not at all Familiar

Barely

Somewhat

Very Familiar



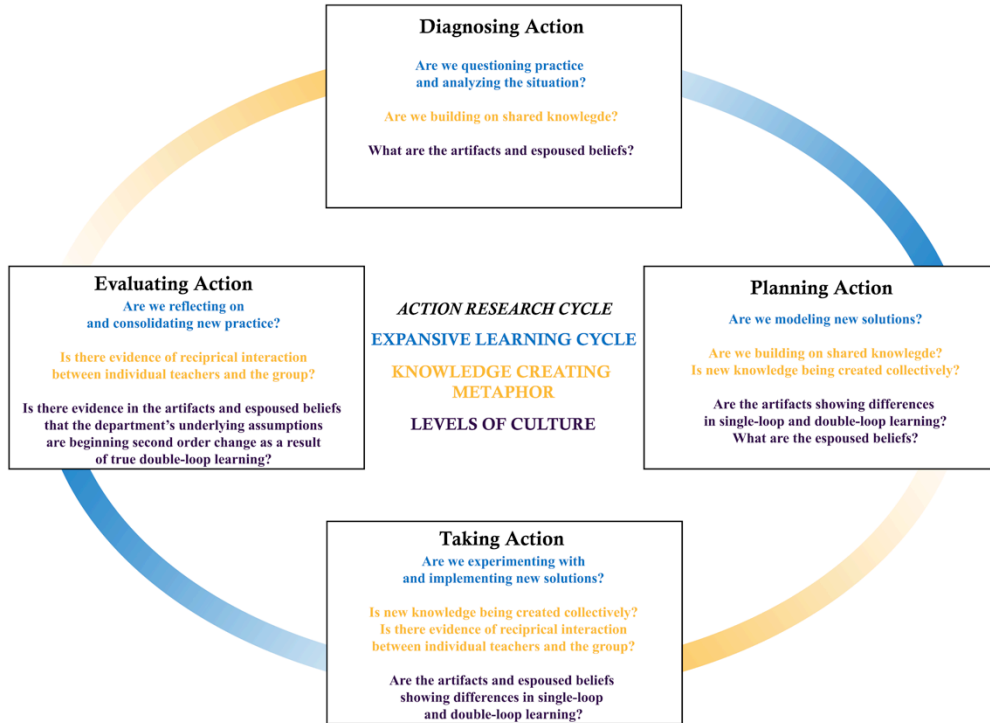
20. What are some obstacles you see hindering your transition to the Common Core literacy standards for history?

*(Mark all that apply)*

- Knowledge about the standards/expectations
- Knowledge about lessons to use
- Lack of administrative support for training
- Lack of administrative support for acquiring resources
- Prefer to continue former teaching practices
- None – I'm doing fine
- Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank you for your participation.*

## Appendix D: The Three-Layered Analysis



Heath, N. Three Layered Analysis of AR Cycle

## Appendix E: Observation Protocol

The following checklist will be used to record the number of times teachers in the collaboration meetings refer to key components of the study's analysis.

	# Times Speaking	# Suggestions for Instruction	# References to CCSS	# Ties to Prior Knowledge/Practice	# New Solutions	# Ideas Built Off Prior Meetings	# Lesson Successes Shared	# Lesson Problems Shared	# Negative Comments About CCSS	# Negative Comments About Collaboration
Participant 1										
Participant 2										
Participant 3										
Participant 4										
Participant 5										
Participant 6										
Participant 7										
Participant 8										
Participant 9										

## **Appendix F: Interview Protocol**

### Opening Script:

Thank you for helping me with this project. I really appreciate it. This interview is part of my research study into how well teachers here are introducing literacy instruction into their classes. Your input will help me get a better sense of what exactly the teachers in this department are going through as they try to meet the expectations of the Common Core. No identifying information will be disclosed to anyone and it really helps if you are as honest and open as possible.

I will be recording this interview and will ask for your permission to do so once I press “record”.

-Press record

My name is Nicholas Heath and I am conducting an interview with \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_, do I have your permission to record this interview? Thank you.

### The Questions:

Tell me about your background in education.

How long have you been teaching, and what subjects?

How familiar are you with the Common Core?

Have you tried to tie in specific Common Core standards into your lessons?

What types of activities do you use for literacy instruction?

How much time do you spend explicitly teaching literacy strategies?

Can you walk me through an actual lesson?

What types of assessment strategies do you use to measure student learning?

How did you learn about these strategies, for instruction or assessment?

What types of specific trainings have you had?

Or have heard of but not been able to attend?

Can you tell me about some strategies you learned from any other colleagues?

Did you get these in your collaboration meetings?

What else have you learned from the collaboration meetings?

Tell me about your thoughts on how well the collaboration meetings on the Common Core have worked for you or others you know.

Have there been any challenges in your collaboration meetings?  
(Disagreements over what Common Core is, how important it is, what to do in the lessons)

How do you feel about literacy instruction in your classroom moving forward?

How well do you think the department will begin incorporating literacy instruction regularly after this year is over?

Do you have any last thoughts about this process the department has been going through, or the Common Core in general?

Closing Script:

Well, that's it for the interview. Thank you again for doing this. It really helps me out. If you want to know how your answers are going to be used, just let me know and I'll share anything you want to know about the project. Thanks.

## **Appendix G: Teacher Portfolio**

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Step 4 – Final Survey (*Appendix H*)

## Common Core Standards **READING 11-12**

The following table shows the literacy in social science standards that will be a part of this study. Consider what lessons/activities you are currently doing that meet these standards.

<b>Reading Standards History/Social Studies 11-12</b>	<b>List any lessons or activities that you do that you believe address the standard</b>
1. Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.	
2. Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.	
3. Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.	
4. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including analyzing how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).	

## Common Core Standards **READING 11-12**

The following table shows the literacy in social science standards that will be a part of this study. Consider what lessons/activities you are currently doing that meet these standards.

<b>Reading Standards History/Social Studies 11-12</b>	<b>List any lessons or activities that you do that you believe address the standard</b>
5. Analyze in detail how a complex primary source is structured, including how key sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text contribute to the whole.	
6. Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.	
8. Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.	
9. Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.	



# Common Core Standards **WRITING 11-12**

The following table shows the literacy in social science standards that will be a part of this study. Consider what lessons/activities you are currently doing that meet these standards.

<b>Writing Standards History/Social Studies 11–12</b>	<b>List any lessons or activities that you do that you believe address the standard</b>
1. Write <b>ARGUMENTS</b> focused on discipline-specific content.	
a. Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences the claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.	
b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant data and evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both claim(s) and counterclaims in a discipline-appropriate form that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.	
c. Use words, phrases, and clauses as well as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.	
d. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.	
e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from or supports the argument presented.	

## Common Core Standards **WRITING 11-12**

The following table shows the literacy in social science standards that will be a part of this study. Consider what lessons/activities you are currently doing that meet these standards.

<b>Writing Standards History/Social Studies 11–12</b>	<b>List any lessons or activities that you do that you believe address the standard</b>
2. Write <b>INFORMATIVE/EXPLANATORY</b> texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.	
a. Introduce a topic and organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.	
b. Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic.	
c. Use varied transitions and sentence structures to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.	
d. Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic; convey a knowledgeable stance in a style that responds to the discipline and context as well as to the expertise of likely readers.	
e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation provided (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).	
4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.	
9. Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.	

## NCSS College, Career, Civic Life (C3) **Dimension 1**

The following table shows the literacy in social science standards that will be a part of this study. Consider what lessons/activities you are currently doing that meet these standards.

<b>Dimension 1</b>	<b>How can this be integrated into the lesson?</b>
<b>Constructing Compelling Questions (<i>Big Picture</i>)</b>	
D1.1.9-12. Explain how a question reflects an enduring issue in the field.	
D1.2.9-12. Explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question	
<b>Constructing Supporting Questions (<i>Specifics</i>)</b>	
D1.3.9-12. Explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a supporting question.	
<b>Determining Helpful Sources</b>	
D1.5.9-12. Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of view represented in the sources, the types of sources available, and the potential uses of the sources.	

## NCSS College, Career, Civic Life (C3) **Dimension 2**

The following table shows the literacy in social science standards that will be a part of this study. Consider what lessons/activities you are currently doing that meet these standards.

<b>Dimension 2</b>	<b>How can this be integrated into the lesson?</b>
<b>Change, Continuity, and Context</b>	
D2.His.1.9-12. Evaluate how historical events and developments were shaped by unique circumstances of time and place as well as broader historical contexts	
D2.His.2.9-12. Analyze change and continuity in historical eras	
D2.His.3.9-12. Use questions generated about individuals and groups to assess how the significance of their actions changes over time and is shaped by the historical context	

<b>Perspectives</b>	
D2.His.4.9-12. Analyze complex and interacting factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras	
D2.His.5.9-12. Analyze how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people's perspectives	
D2.His.6.9-12. Analyze the ways in which the perspectives of those writing history shaped the history that they produced	

<p>D2.His.7.9-12. Explain how the perspectives of people in the present shape interpretations of the past</p>	
<p>D2.His.8.9-12. Analyze how current interpretations of the past are limited by the extent to which available historical sources represent perspectives of people at the time.</p>	
<p><b>Historical Sources and Evidence</b></p>	
<p>D2.His.9.9-12. Analyze the relationship between historical sources and the secondary interpretations made from them</p>	

<p>D2.His.10.9-12. Detect possible limitations in various kinds of historical evidence and differing secondary interpretations</p>	
<p>D2.His.11.9-12. Critique the usefulness of historical sources for a specific historical inquiry based on their maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose</p>	
<p>D2.His.12.9-12. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to pursue further inquiry and investigate additional sources</p>	
<p>D2.His.13.9-12. Critique the appropriateness of the historical sources used in a secondary interpretation</p>	

<b>Causation and Argumentation</b>	
D2.His.14.9-12. Analyze multiple and complex causes and effects of events in the past.	
D2.His.15.9-12. Distinguish between long-term causes and triggering events in developing a historical argument	
D2.His.16.9-12. Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past	
D2.His.17.9-12. Critique the central arguments in secondary works of history on related topics in multiple media in terms of their historical accuracy	



## NCSS College, Career, Civic Life (C3) **Dimension 3**

The following table shows the literacy in social science standards that will be a part of this study. Consider what lessons/activities you are currently doing that meet these standards.

<b>Dimension 3</b>	<b>How can this be integrated into the lesson?</b>
<b>Gathering and Evaluating Sources</b>	
D3.1.9-12. Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.	
D3.2.9-12. Evaluate the credibility of a source by examining how experts value the source	
<b>Developing Claims and Using Evidence</b>	
D3.3.9-12. Identify evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims	
D3.4.9-12. Refine claims and counterclaims attending to precision, significance, and knowledge conveyed through the claim while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both	

# Lesson Plan Rough Draft

Date Range:

SubjectMatter: \_\_\_\_\_

ContentStandard: \_\_\_\_\_ (number only)

CommonCoreStandards: \_\_\_\_\_ (number only)

C3Framework: \_\_\_\_\_ (number only)

Lesson Stage	Notes on how this can be implemented in the lesson
Anticipatory Set (Activate prior knowledge)	
Objective	

Instruction

*-modeling*  
*-guided practice*

Independent Practice

Check for Understanding	
<b>Common Core Standards</b>	<b>Details on how the standards are addressed in the lesson</b>
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

Lesson Plan's Rubric

Date Range:

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

ContentStandard: \_\_\_\_\_ (number only)

CommonCoreStandards: \_\_\_\_\_ (number only)

C3Framework: \_\_\_\_\_ (number only)

<b>Category</b>	<b>Below Basic 1</b>	<b>Basic 2</b>	<b>Proficient 3</b>	<b>Advanced 4</b>

# Complete Lesson Plan

Date Range: \_\_\_\_\_

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

ContentStandard: \_\_\_\_\_

CommonCoreStandards:  
\_\_\_\_\_

C3 Framework:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Lesson Stage	Details on how this will occur in the lesson
Anticipatory Set (Activate prior knowledge)	
Objective	

<p>Instruction</p> <p><i>-modeling</i></p> <p><i>-guided practice</i></p>	
<p>Independent Practice</p>	
<p>Check for Understanding</p>	
<p><b>Common Core Standards</b></p>	<p><b>Details on how this is addressed in the lesson</b></p>

<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
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Lesson Reflection

Date of Lesson:

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

ContentStandard: \_\_\_\_\_ (number only)

CommonCoreStandards: \_\_\_\_\_ (number only)

C3Framework: \_\_\_\_\_ (number only)



Lesson Stage	How did it go? What changes would you make next time?
Anticipatory Set (Activate prior knowledge)	
Objective	
Instruction  <i>-modeling</i> <i>-guided practice</i>	
Independent Practice	

Check for Understanding	
<b>Common Core Standards</b>	<b>Details on how well each standard worked in the lesson</b>
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

## Appendix H: Final Survey Instrument

### Survey of Literacy Practices in Social Studies

This survey is designed to gather information about how literacy instruction in your social studies department is improving and where opportunities exist for better aligning practices with Common Core expectations. Your responses will aid in the future development of an action plan to improve students' ability to understand social studies content across all courses.

#### Section One: Teaching Experience

1. How many years have you been teaching social studies?

- Up to 2       3-5       6-10       11-15       16-20       20-30       31+

2. How many years have you been teaching social studies at this school?

- Up to 2       3-5       6-10       11-15       16-20       20-30       31+

3. What subjects do you currently teach?

*(Mark all that apply)*

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> World History                | <input type="checkbox"/> Honors World History |
| <input type="checkbox"/> U.S. History                 | <input type="checkbox"/> A.P. U.S. History    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> U.S. Government              | <input type="checkbox"/> A.P. U.S. Government |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economics                    | <input type="checkbox"/> A.P. Economics       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Psychology                   | <input type="checkbox"/> A.P. Psychology      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain) _____ |   |

Section Two: Literacy Strategies

4. In a typical week, how much time do you think students in your classes should spend reading instructional texts (e.g. textbook, primary source documents)?

(a) In class...

0-30min.    30-60min.    60-90min.    90-120min.    120+min.

(b) For homework...

0-30min.    30-60min.    60-90min.    90-120min.    120+min.

5. What are some obstacles you see getting students to read as much as you would like?

(Mark all that apply)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time to read                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Need help teaching reading strategies         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time to grade assessments    | <input type="checkbox"/> Ensuring accurate grading                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student push-back            | <input type="checkbox"/> It's not a priority when planning instruction |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Too much content to cover    | <input type="checkbox"/> None  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain) _____ |  |

6. In a typical week, how much time do you think students in your classes should spend writing?

(a) Informational pieces...

0-30min.    30-60min.    60-90min.    90-120min.    120+min.

(b) Argumentative pieces...

0-30min.    30-60min.    60-90min.    90-120min.    120+min.

7. How many times per week should students in your classes be writing pieces of the following lengths?

- |                       |                            |                            |                            |                            |                            |                             |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Less than a paragraph | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6+ |
| One paragraph         | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6+ |
| One page              | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6+ |
| Two or more pages     | <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6+ |

8. What are some obstacles you see getting students to write as much as you would like?

(Mark all that apply)

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time to write                | <input type="checkbox"/> Need help teaching writing strategies         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time to grade                | <input type="checkbox"/> Ensuring accurate grading                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student push-back            | <input type="checkbox"/> It's not a priority when planning instruction |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Too much content to cover    | <input type="checkbox"/> None  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain) _____ |  |

### Section Three: Professional Development

9. How useful have you found this action research project to be for your instructional practice?

- Did not participate     Not at all     Slightly     Mostly     Very

10. In what areas have you begun to review your practices because of this action research project?

*(Mark all that apply)*

- Reading
- Writing
- Assessment
- Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_
- I have not reviewed any practices because of this action research project
- Instructional Techniques
- Planning
- Goal Setting

Section Four: Collaboration Meetings

11. How many collaboration meetings with teachers of your same subject have you attended this school year (during the action research project)?

- None
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6+

12. What topics did you cover in these recent collaboration meetings?

*(Mark all that apply)*

- Literacy
- Assessment
- Instructional Techniques
- Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_
- Planning
- Goal Setting



17. What are some obstacles you still see hindering your transition to the Common Core literacy standards for history?

*(Mark all that apply)*

- Knowledge about the standards/expectations
- Knowledge about lessons to use
- Waiting for new content standards
- Lack of administrative support for training
- Lack of administrative support for acquiring resources
- Prefer to continue former teaching practices
- None – I’m doing fine
- Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

18. How likely are you to keep an intentional, focused effort on improving literacy instruction in your classes?

- Not at all       Somewhat       Mostly       Very

*Thank you for your participation.*

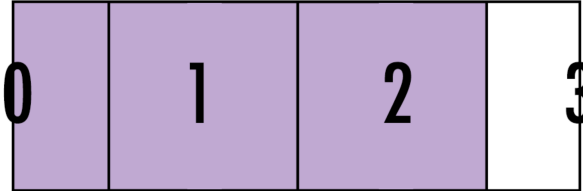


## Appendix I: Survey Results

Post-Survey Results

Date Range: \_\_ January 2015 \_\_

Question	Response
How much time <b>should</b> students spend reading instructional text in class?	30-60 minutes per week the department previously reported students <b>are</b> reading about 45 minutes per week
How much time <b>should</b> students spend reading instructional text for homework?	30-60 minutes per week the department previously reported students <b>are</b> reading about 50 minutes per week
What percent of department members reported that the following obstacles are keeping students from being able to read as much as they would like?	time for reading 80% time to grade 60% need help with strategies 40% student push-back 40% accurately grading work 33.3% too much content to cover 20% not a priority when planning 6.7% *students not completing homework  no one said there are no obstacles
How much time <b>should</b> students spend writing expository (informative/argumentative) pieces each week?	informative: 45 minutes per week argumentative: 30 minutes per week the department previously reported students <b>are</b> writing these about 50 minutes per week
How often <b>should</b> students write pieces less than a paragraph in length each week?	3.45 times per week the department previously reported students <b>are</b> writing 3.86 times per week

<p>How often <b>should</b> students write pieces a paragraph in length each week?</p>	<p>2.67 times per week the department previously reported they <b>are</b> writing 2.93 times per week</p>
<p>How often <b>should</b> students write pieces about a page in length?</p>	<p>1.27 times per week the department previously reported they <b>are</b> writing 1.14 times per week</p>
<p>How often <b>should</b> students write pieces more than a page in length?</p>	<p>0.77 times per week the department previously reported they <b>are</b> writing 0.86 times per week</p>
<p>What percent of department members reported that the following obstacles are keeping students from being able to write as much as they would like?</p>	<p>time to write 86.7% time to grade 86.7% accurately grading work 40% need help with strategies 40% student push-back 20% too much content to cover 20% not a priority when planning 6.7% *students not completing homework</p> <p>no one said there are none</p>
<p>How useful have you found this action research project to be for your instructional practice?</p>	<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>0</b>      <b>1</b>      <b>2</b>      <b>3</b></p> <p><b>Not at all</b>      <b>Slightly</b>      <b>Mostly</b>      <b>Very</b></p> </div> <p style="text-align: center;">*2.5 (previous literacy training scored a usefulness of 1.56 on the pre-survey)</p>

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