2012-2013 Reflection
Norma Newkirk

Common Core Standards

All students should be encouraged to learn in an environment where they feel welcomed, safe, and comfortable. One of the tools that teachers can use to enhance learning and get optimum results in the classroom is a curriculum designed to demonstrate Common Core Standards.

As educators, it is our primary responsibility to ensure that all students reach the highest level of achievement through a curriculum that demonstrates student progress. Implementation of Common Core Standards must include practices that ensure equity and effectiveness, closing achievement gaps through highly effective teachers and administrators.

One of the professional practices that I implement in my classroom is Planning and Preparation, and Setting Instructional Outcomes designed specifically for student assessment. Communicating with students using questioning and discussion techniques help to engage students in the learning community and establish a culture for learning. When students feel safe and welcomed it creates an environment of respect and rapport that is effective in implementing classroom instructional procedures and managing student behavior.

Common Core Standards encourage research-based knowledge of learning, educational theories, professional practice, and the use of a broad range of instructional strategies to make subject matter more accessible. Students will understand how to connect concepts across disciplines and engage in critical and innovative thinking and collaborative problem solving related to relevant instruction. Teachers will learn to connect students’ prior understanding and experience to new knowledge.

The Common Core Standards as discussed in Calkins’ book help educators learn more effective ways to evaluate and utilize curricular materials and other appropriate resources to promote student success in achieving central concepts, tools of inquiry and current developments within their discipline.
2012-2013 Reflection
Robert Smith

The shifts that I am making in my practice, based on the guidance of the Common Core, are made at the strategic level, and as such, influence tactical decisions and responses. Strategic changes at the classroom level are mainly confined to curriculum design, lesson planning and workspace design. My tactical implementation of those ‘big ideas’ inspired by the Common Core was driven by my reading of Calkins, et. al. and our discussions around those ideas. Calkins offers a range of ideas that can be implemented at a level particular to the reader. There are barriers to implementation of the Common Core’s principles at each of those levels and I have seen my share of challenges at the classroom level. Challenges include integrating scheduling limitations, population particulars, and institutional inertia. Many challenges lie in the path of a robust Common Core implementation at Biondi but with individual action, professional guidance, and persistent problem solving the challenges will become opportunities.

The changes to my practice at this stage begin at the lesson plan level. I incorporate the CC’s goals into my formal lesson plans each week and for each of my subjects. The places where I have full lesson plan control like ELA and Social Studies are, fortunately, the same ones for which the CC has currently provided guidance. Other classes are linked to the formal lesson models of program providers (Just Words, Wilson, Word Generation) and do not lend themselves to tweaking. The Math standards are an area of challenge at this time.

English

In my ELA block I have instituted a Weekly Reading Log for my students to read 20-30 minutes each day at home. The dynamic nature of my classroom population limits the opportunity for a dedicated in-class reading block; the Weekly Log serves as a reasonable proxy.

Another way the CC has changed my practice is with my class’s daily journal. The CC was inspired with their seismic shift from “What do you think?” to “What does the text say?” and I want to develop that thinking among my students. Challenging students to examine information, no matter what media presents it, for itself and not for their personal reactions to the material has been an ongoing challenge but one with promise.

Social Studies

My Social Studies classes have also changed from the benefits of the CC’s principles. The questioning strategy that the CC builds around the key ideas and Details Reading Standards, for example, are easily portable to a modified curriculum. In my short experience, students have more difficulty with Craft and Structure questions but benefit from the exercise nonetheless.
Math
My students are also challenged by the Mathematical Practices that span the curriculum ladder by their abstract and rigid natures. Practices like “reason abstractly and quantitatively” (#2) or “attend to precision” are very often beyond the ability of assistive technology, educational scaffolds, or curriculum accommodations. The CC’s focus on manipulatives is also a difficult horse to saddle and ride with an empty stable.

- Calkins has been an invaluable place to start for all my CC explorations. The nature of the book makes it a deep resource for ideas to implement, external resources to explore and warnings about hazards to implementation. Calkins has been my primary source for all ideas CC. Calkins provided debate and direction, background and predictions, CC text and interpretation. I have supplemented my diet of CC background with readings in Education Week or Teachers College Record or in general interest papers like The New York Times. For better or worse all of these other data points are filtered through Calkins’ lens.

- The barriers to implementation of the CC’s principles are related to the school’s population, my position and my personal limitations. The Biondi School’s population does not lend itself to navigating the CC’s change in course with its emphasis on challenging reading and investigative connections. Histories of trauma, learning disabilities, and behavior challenges make interaction with the CC’s reserved and distant goals awkward and often unproductive. For example, most of my students have an-ADHD type diagnosis and are not disposed to sustained attention that text investigations demand...