Teachers' Perceptions about the Common Core State Standards in Writing

Anna H. Hall*
Clemson University

Amy Hutchison
Iowa State University

Kelley Mayer White
College of Charleston

* Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Anna H. Hall, 407B Tillman Hall, Clemson University, Clemson, South Carolina 29634. Email: ah2@clemson.edu

Abstract

This article describes findings from a survey completed by 250 K-12th grade teachers from eight states (i.e., Kentucky, Minnesota, Michigan, Maine, Delaware, North Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi) that had fully implemented the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by spring 2013. The survey was designed to examine teachers' perceptions about their preparedness to teach the CCSS in Writing as well as provide information about what teachers perceived as barriers to implementing the standards, their perceptions of the positive and negative effects of CCSS implementation, and their professional development experiences related to implementing the standards. The results of the analyses indicate that teachers vary in their current level of acceptability regarding the CCSS in Writing according to the grade level they teach, their years of teaching experience, and the amount of professional development they have received. Significant differences were not found between teachers from different geographic settings or between schools with high and low numbers of students receiving free or reduced lunch. Implications for professional development and teacher education are discussed.

Keywords: writing, professional development, Common Core State Standards, survey research

"The Common Core [State] Standards in Writing are an upper middle class pipe dream about education. It is not relevant to many of my students, and they will never need it again" (Kristen, survey respondent)

"[The CCSS in Writing] increase the value of effective communication for students and educators, focus on real world applications, reduce reliance on textbooks and irrelevant literature, and better prepare students for the next level" (Julie, survey respondent).

These are the words of two teachers - both working in states that have fully implemented the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in Writing (National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) - but each sharing different views on the value and acceptability of the standards for their students. Research suggests that teachers' classroom actions and interactions with students are influenced by their personal theories and beliefs about teaching and learning (Clark &

Peterson, 1986). Research also demonstrates that it is not enough to know if procedures are effective; they must also be deemed socially appropriate and acceptable by the individuals who are implementing them (Kazdin, 1977; Wolf, 1978).

In this article, we describe findings from a survey designed to examine teachers' perceptions about their preparedness to teach the CCSS in Writing. The survey also aimed to provide information about what teachers perceived as barriers to implementing the standards, their perceptions of the positive and negative effects of implementation of the CCSS in Writing, and their professional development experiences related to implementing these standards. We surveyed teachers (K-12th grade) from eight states (i.e., Kentucky, Minnesota, Michigan, Maine, Delaware, North Carolina, Georgia, and Mississippi) that had fully implemented the CCSS by spring 2013. This resulted in 250 completed surveys. We believe one advantage of a small number of states leading the way in implementation of the CCSS is that the states that follow can learn from the successes and failures of the leading states. Although state leaders are an important voice for improvements that need to be made, the survey responses described in this article give teachers a voice to speak for themselves and for the students for which the standards were created.

CCSS Implementation

In spring of 2012, Kentucky became the first state to fully implement the CCSS. Seven states joined Kentucky in the full implementation of the CCSS in 2013, followed by an additional 20 states in 2014. The remaining participating states will have fully implemented the standards by 2016 (Council of Chief State School Officers, n.d.). As the CCSS are gradually implemented across the country, most states remain in the training stage with their teachers. Teachers in early implementation states have found the transition to be challenging due to the broad nature of the standards and the lack of appropriate professional development (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012). Successful implementation of the CCSS will continue to require large amounts of time and funding to achieve this complex task.

Thus far, educators report a variety of challenges in implementing the CCSS. A report released in 2012 by the Center on Education Policy described barriers to CCSS implementation in year two. Authors found insufficient funding as one of the primary challenges experienced by states who had implemented the CCSS (Kober & Rentner, 2012). At the time of the report, only three states anticipated changing their decision to adopt the standards, but all indicated insufficient funding would be the primary factor in this decision. Funding is necessary for providing high-quality professional development and for the technology needed to implement online assessments. Given these challenges, governors in seven states (i.e., Oklahoma, South Carolina, North Carolina, Louisiana, Wisconsin, Utah, and Pennsylvania) have recently begun backtracking on their support of the standards by signing bills to repeal or significantly modify standards before further implementation. States that have continued to move forward with implementation, in a time when resources are scarce, will have to think creatively regarding how to best support teachers. In-depth and ongoing professional development will be vital in providing teachers with the tools and knowledge to carry out quality implementation plans (McLaughlin & Overturf, 2012).

Theoretical Perspectives

Teachers' Theories, Beliefs, and Perceptions

All teachers begin their careers with their own theories and beliefs about education. These theories and beliefs develop as a result of having a multitude of their own K-12 educational experiences, observing many examples of teaching over time, and engaging in methods courses and field placements

during their preservice education. Teachers' beliefs may remain stable or change over time based on their perceptions. While beliefs are a dispositional state of mind which endure over time, perceptions are informed by events that take place at a specific time through direct interactions with one's environment (Smith, 2001). For example, a teacher may believe that kindergarten children are capable of writing using invented spelling, because he or she has observed or perceived multiple students using this strategy in the classroom.

Teachers acquire new theories and beliefs based on their perceptions of teaching strategies introduced during professional development workshops, observations of peer teaching models, and through personal teaching experiences (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009; Weinburg, 2007). While all teachers enter the classroom with theories and beliefs about how and what they would like to teach, there is much concern that the pressures associated with standardized testing and teacher accountability cause teachers to stray from what they deem to be best practice (Geist & Baum, 2005).

As it is a relatively new reform, examining the perceptions that teachers hold about the CCSS is important for two reasons. First, if teachers do not feel supported by their school districts and are not satisfied with the professional development they are receiving to implement the CCSS, it seems likely that they will not maintain the high level of expectations set forth in the standards. Second, teachers are unlikely to implement the CCSS with fidelity, if they feel that the standards do not align with their own personal theories and beliefs about education, including their beliefs about what are appropriate expectations of students (Kemple, Kim, Ellis, & Han, 2008). Therefore, this study examines the link between teachers' perceptions of their preparedness, confidence, and familiarity with the CCSS in Writing to help us understand their acceptability of the standards and the likelihood they will implement the standards with fidelity.

Acceptability

Beginning in the late 1960's, behavior analysts became interested in the acceptability (or social perception) of treatment approaches. Throughout the 1980's, Kazdin and others continued research on treatment acceptability for a wide range of procedures and developed conceptual models to illustrate the relationship between the degree to which individuals perceive a treatment to be reasonable and its overall effectiveness (Miltenberger, 1990; Reimers, Wacker, & Koeppl, 1987; Witt & Elliott, 1985). For the purposes of this study, we defined treatment acceptability as the degree to which interventions are perceived as reasonable and appropriate for the given challenge (i.e., implementation of the CCSS in Writing; Kazdin, 1981).

Relatedly, researchers examining academic interventions have described several factors that may affect treatment implementation and acceptability, including the complexity of the intervention, the teacher's understanding of the intervention, the teacher's ability to implement given his or her current resources, and the teacher's perception of the value and feasibility of implementation (Chafouleas, Briesch, Riley-Tillman, & McCoach, 2009; Mautone et al., 2009). Orne and Binik (1989) argued that treatment implementation is determined by the interplay of these varying factors instead of a single underlying dimension. Thus, the current study used survey research methods to examine related factors that may affect teachers' usage of the CCSS in Writing including the degree of teachers' perceived ability to carry out successful implementation (e.g., preparedness, confidence, familiarity) and potential barriers (Chafouleas, et al., 2009). Data from the current study were analyzed with the literature on treatment acceptability as a lens, with the goal of adding to the literature on the acceptability of interventions in education. We hypothesized that teachers would vary in their levels of acceptability based on their years of teaching experience, the grade level they taught, the geographic setting in which they taught, and the percentage of students in their school receiving free or reduced lunch.

Method

The current study used online survey research methods to examine teachers' perceptions about the CCSS in Writing. The sample consisted of 250 language arts teachers (K-12th grade) from the eight states that had fully implemented the CCSS by spring 2013. This specific sample was selected, because they (a) taught English Language Arts in K-12th grade and (b) taught in a state that had fully implemented the CCSS. Demographics were representative of teachers in the general regions surveyed regarding ethnicity and school location. The majority of survey respondents were elementary teachers (54%), followed by high school teachers (24%) and then middle grades teachers (22%).

The survey was designed to measure teachers' perceptions of the following four topics related to the implementation of the CCSS in Writing: (1) Preparedness to implement the CCSS in Writing; (2) Barriers to implementing the CCSS in Writing; (3) Positive and negative effects of implementing the CCSS in Writing; and (4) Professional development experiences related to implementing the standards.

The development and validation of the online questionnaire followed authoritative procedures and recommendations in the literature on survey development (Dillman, 2007; Rea & Parker, 2005). First, content validity was assessed using an expert panel of reviewers (Litwin, 1995). The questionnaire was revised based on feedback from the expert panel. Revisions included clarification in the wording of several items to ensure the questions were closely related to the target topics. Subsequently, the survey was piloted with a focus group of teachers who had similar characteristics as the teachers in the target population. Changes were again made based on feedback and responses from the pilot survey. The final survey consisted of 12 items with Likert scale, open-ended, and multiple choice response options. Multiple choice items included a variety of choices informed by the literature on CCSS and were followed by an open-ended item related to the same topic. For example, teachers were asked to select specific barriers to implementation (e.g., not enough instructional time) and then were asked for other examples of barriers in the open-ended follow-up item. The complete version of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

Survey Recruitment and Rates of Response

To recruit participants, nine school districts were randomly selected from each state by listing the districts alphabetically, numbering them, and then using randomization software (www.random.org). An email was then sent to district superintendents to acquire permission to distribute the survey to teachers. Once permission was acquired, principals in the district distributed the survey link to teachers through email. It is not possible to compute a response rate for this study because the number of principals who chose to distribute the survey is unknown; however, we believe the large number of respondents in our true random sample, as well as the representative demographics of our sample somewhat compensates for this limitation. We received 418 survey responses from teachers across the eight states surveyed, but only 250 of the surveys were complete, so only the completed 250 survey responses were included in the data analysis. Table 1 provides a description of survey participants.

Data and Interpretations

Data Analysis

Likert scale items from the survey were analyzed using descriptive techniques and Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs). ANOVAs were performed to determine if there were significant differences in teachers' preparation, experiences and perceptions based on several independent variables. Independent

ANOVAs were performed instead of a factorial ANOVA due to the large number of independent variables. Specific details of the tests performed are provided in the results section.

The six open-ended items were analyzed using a content-analysis approach (Neuendorf, 2002) with an emergent coding scheme. Accordingly, two researchers first reviewed all responses individually and created categories to code each participant's response. For example, responses related to the positive effects of implementing CCSS in Writing on instruction in math, science, and social studies were coded as w*riting across the curriculum.* For each open-ended item, the researchers first coded the data individually. Then, the researchers exchanged coded responses to discuss discrepancies and reach an agreement on shared categories. This resulted in a varying number of coding categories for each item. Once the coding categories were established, the researchers independently coded 10% of the data to establish inter-rater agreement. After reaching at least 90% agreement for each item, the researchers independently coded the remaining data.

Results

The results are organized according to the topics of the survey. Within each section, we have combined quantitative responses with open-ended responses to best illustrate teachers' responses related to each topic.

Teacher Familiarity with the Standards and Perceptions of Preparation

Teachers were asked a series of questions to gauge their perceptions of their preparedness and confidence more generally regarding teaching the CCSS in Writing. Specifically, teachers were asked to indicate their overall familiarity with the standards, how prepared they believe they are to teach the CCSS in Writing, their confidence in their abilities to teach the CCSS in Writing, and what would help them to feel better prepared to teach the writing standards. For each question, a four point Likert scale using the following stems was used: not at all, slightly, somewhat, and very. These stems were followed by the appropriate descriptor (i.e., familiar, prepared, or confident) for each item. A majority of survey responses indicate that teachers are "somewhat familiar" (45%) with the CCSS in Writing. Similarly, teachers primarily indicated feeling "somewhat prepared" (46%) to teach the CCSS in Writing. Additionally, teachers indicated that they felt somewhat confident (46%) in their abilities to teach writing in general. See Table 2 for a complete listing of responses to these items.

Analyses of Variance (ANOVAs) were conducted to determine if there were differences in teachers' familiarity with the CCSS Writing Standards and how prepared they feel to teach using the CCSS Writing Standards based on years of teaching experience, grade level taught, geographic setting (urban, suburban, or rural), the percentage of students in the school receiving free or reduced lunch, and other factors as relevant. Results revealed several statistically significant differences. An alpha level of .05 was used for all statistical tests. First, there were significant effects for grade level, [F (2, 243) = 13.58, p =< .001, η^2 =.43], years teaching experience [F (4, 243) = 3.95, p = .01, η^2 =.25], and the amount of professional development received [F (4, 243) = 13.58, p = < .001, η^2 = 0.43] on teachers' familiarity with the CCSS Writing Standards. Effect sizes were interpreted using the commonly accepted guidelines that .01, .06, and .14 represent small, medium, and large effects, respectively (Fields, 2013). Thus, the effects of grade level, years teaching experience, and amount of professional development are considered to be large. A post hoc Tukey test revealed the following: (1) K-3 teachers were more familiar with the CCSS Writing Standards (M = 3.32, SD .74) than teachers of grades 6-8 (M = 2.79, SD = .72) and grades 9-12 (M = 2.87, SD = .81); (2) Teachers with 1-5 years of teaching experience were less familiar with the CCSS Writing Standards (M = 2.76, SD = .86) than teachers who reported 16-20 (M = 3.33 , SD =.78) or 21 or more (M = 3.30 , SD = .75) years of teaching experience;

and (3) Teachers with less than one day of professional development on the CCSS Writing Standards were less familiar with the standards (M = 2.70, SD = .93) than teachers who had received one day (M = 3.14 , SD = .79), two to three days (M = 3.26 , SD = .62), four to five days (M = 3.39 , SD = .69), or more than five days (M = 3.73 , SD = .45) of professional development on the standards. There were no statistically significant differences in teachers' familiarity with the standards based on geographic setting of the school or percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch.

There was a significant main effect for grade level on how prepared teachers report they are to teach the CCSS in Writing [F (3, 243) = 3.72, p = .01, η^2 = 0.21]. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey test indicate that teachers of grades K-3 feel more prepared to teach the CCSS in Writing (M = 2.99, SD = .85) than teachers of grades 9-12 (M = 2.62, SD = .96). There was no statistically significant effect of years of teaching experience or geographic setting on teachers' preparedness to teach the CCSS in Writing. Regarding what teachers perceive would help them to feel better prepared to teach the CCSS for Writing, four responses were selected most prominently: (1) access to curricular resources aligned to the CCSS for Writing (72%), (2) more planning time (70%), (3) more time to collaborate with colleagues (67%), and (4) access to assessment resources aligned to the CCSS (63%). The least selected response was "more information about how the CCSS differ from my state standards prior to CCSS implementation" (25%). See Table 3 for a complete listing of responses. The percentages in the table do not add up to 100% because respondents could provide multiple answers.

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of grade level taught on the types of resources that teachers perceived would help them be better prepared to teach the CCSS for Writing. There was a significant effect of grade level on teachers' perceptions that access to curricular resources aligned to the CCSS would help them be better prepared [F (3, 246) = 3.48, p = .01, η^2 = .20] and teachers' perceptions that more time to collaborate with colleagues would help them be better prepared to teach the standards [F (3, 246) = 5.93, p = .01, η^2 = .26].

Teachers were also provided the option to indicate something other than the responses provided in the survey by entering a response into an open-ended text box. Eight percent of respondents chose to indicate something other than the provided responses. Three major categories of responses were identified: (1) Resources and examples of student work (57%), (2) More time to explicitly teach writing (33%), and (3) Ability to differentiate and/or adjust the pace for students with different needs (10%). Examples of responses in these categories include comments such as "[We need] demos of other teachers modeling it the correct way, from beginning to end, not just an insert." Regarding the second category of response (the need for more time to explicitly teach writing), responses included ideas such as the following:
There is little to no time available to explicitly teach writing. The Common Core has the writing standards interwoven with the reading standards. Most writing assignments or standards focus on response to literature. Our students need direct, explicit instruction in how to write complete sentences, paragraphs, and essays, not just quick responses.

Regarding the third category of response (the ability to differentiate or adjust the pace for students with different needs), responses included ideas such as:
[We need] more time to just work through this with students. I appreciate rigor, but the speed at which the pacing guides are written does not allow for mastery of much of anything. There is barely time to remediate students who are functioning ON [caps in original] grade level, let alone reteach those who are not anywhere close to meeting standard.

Finally, when teachers were asked how prepared they felt to teach the CCSS in Writing to different groups of students (i.e., English-language learners, students with disabilities, low-income students, academically at-risk students, and gifted and talented students), they reported feeling most prepared to teach gifted and talented students and their students as a whole and least prepared to teach English-language learners and students with disabilities. See Table 4 for a complete listing of responses.

Barriers to Implementation

Teachers were also asked to indicate what they perceive as major barriers to effectively integrating the CCSS in Writing. Respondents were provided with seven possible barriers and asked to check all that applied. Additionally, they were provided with the option to indicate something other than the barriers listed on the survey. The barriers that were indicated most frequently were "not enough instructional time" (69%) and "lack of materials/resources needed" (48%). The barriers that were indicated least frequently were "poor quality training/professional development in this area" (16%) and "little to no support from administration and/or school district" (8%). See Table 5 for a complete listing of responses. Further, ANOVAs revealed that there were no significant effects of teaching experience, grade level, geographic setting, or percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch on whether teachers perceived each of the possible barriers as prohibitive to their implementation of the CCSS in Writing.

Eighteen percent of teachers chose to enter an open-ended response to indicate additional perceived barriers. These responses were analyzed using a content analysis approach and grouped into two primary categories. The first category of response was classified as "Insufficient Background Knowledge," and 11% of respondents indicated barriers that were grouped into this category. Responses in this category indicated concerns such as "Most of my students lack the prior knowledge and skills needed to meet the Common Core Standards," and "Many of my students have weak prerequisite skills to meet standards at this level." Seven percent of all teachers provided responses that were grouped into the second response category, which was "Unrealistic Expectations for Students." Examples of responses in this category include ideas such as "The students struggle to comprehend the material and retain it due to their maturity level. They have to learn too much too fast; therefore, they give up and don't apply themselves," and "Students are not developmentally ready for this complexity of writing."

Perceptions of Positive and Negative Effects of Implementation

Teachers were asked to provide open-ended responses about what they perceived to be positive and negative effects of implementing the CCSS in Writing. Table 7 summarizes the categories that emerged from the analysis about the positive effects of implementation, an example of a response coded for that category, and the percentage of teachers whose responses related to each category. Results indicate the primary benefits teachers perceived from implementing the CCSS in Writing are the extent to which they increase the rigor of writing instruction and how they set high expectations for students. Corresponding with the previous table regarding positive effects of implementation, Table 8 summarizes the categories that emerged from the analysis about the negative effects of implementing the CCSS in Writing. In analyzing teachers' responses to this open-ended question, it seems many of the responses express barriers to teaching the CCSS in Writing rather than the negative effects of implementing them; however, these responses still provide insight into teachers' concerns about the CCSS in Writing, a majority of which were related to a lack of instructional time to teach the standards and to the rigor of the standards.

Professional Development on the Common Core Standards

To consider teachers' professional development experiences related to the CCSS in Writing, teachers were asked to indicate: (a) how many days of professional development they received, (b) what was helpful about the professional development, and (c) what Common Core Writing topics they would like to see addressed in future professional development opportunities. A majority of teachers (39%)

indicated they had received less than one day of professional development on teaching the CCSS in Writing (See Table 9).

Although a majority of teachers received relatively little professional development on the CCSS in Writing, those who had received professional development had valuable insight regarding what was useful about these experiences. Table 10 summarizes responses to an open-ended item inquiring about strengths of the professional development received. The table includes the categories that emerged from the analysis, an example of a response coded for that category, and the percentage of teachers whose responses related to each category.

Finally, teachers also responded to an open-ended prompt about topics they would find useful for future professional development sessions related to the CCSS in Writing. Responses to this question are indicated in Table 11.

Discussion

Research suggests that teachers' theories and beliefs about academic subjects and their perceptions about acceptable expectations for their students affect how they choose to implement academic interventions (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009; Weinburg, 2007). The purpose of the current study was to examine teachers' perceptions about their preparedness to teach the CCSS in Writing, barriers to implementing the standards, the positive and negative effects of CCSS implementation, and their beliefs about their professional development experiences addressing the CCSS. By examining teachers' perceptions about the CCSS in Writing and their current levels of acceptability, it is our goal that teachers' voices will be used to directly inform future work in this area. In this section, we present discussion of our findings and implications for how these findings might be used to inform future rollout of educational reforms, and perhaps, more specifically, to better support educators implementing the CCSS in Writing.

Improving Teachers' Familiarity with and Preparedness to Teach the CCSS in Writing

In this study, a majority of teachers reported they feel only somewhat familiar with and somewhat prepared to teach the CCSS in Writing. We can only speculate regarding the exact reasons teachers do not feel fully prepared to teach the CCSS in Writing, but we can consider some plausible solutions. First, teachers expressed value in opportunities to "break down" the standards due to the complexity associated with them. Thus, school leaders should ensure that teachers are provided with ample time and appropriate leadership to become more familiar with the standards and to seek clarification where needed. Second, it was clear from the survey responses that teachers who were provided with more professional development, felt more familiar with the standards. Administrators should continue to prioritize professional development on the CCSS in Writing as they continue to move forward with CCSS implementation.

Further analysis of our data revealed differences in teachers' familiarity and preparedness by grade level. Teachers who taught in kindergarten through 3rd grades reported feeling more familiar and more prepared to teach the CCSS in Writing, in comparison to middle and high school teachers. Districts' professional development efforts should continue to focus on implementation of CCSS across the curriculum and should include teachers across content areas in middle school and high school in order to ensure better integration of the CCSS in Writing across the school day.

This study also revealed teachers with less experience in the classroom felt less familiarity with the standards. This may speak to the need for preservice teacher education programs to place greater emphasis on the CCSS or on writing in general. In a survey of institutions, Totten (2005) found that few pre-service teacher (PST) programs require PSTs to take courses on methods of teaching writing. Without an intentional introduction to the theories and methods of teaching writing, teachers cannot be

expected to be confident in their abilities in this area. Further, even when writing theory and methods are introduced in PST programs, teachers need continued training and support to continue their professional growth in this area (Darling-Hammond, 1996), perhaps particularly during their first few years in the classroom.

Overcoming Perceived Barriers to Implementation

Not surprisingly, teachers reported lack of time and resources as the two biggest barriers to implementation of the CCSS in Writing; however, a lack of time to teach writing is not a new problem for teachers. Research has established wide variability in the amount of time teachers spend on writing instruction (Graham et al., 2003). Though it is unlikely school leaders can add more time into the school day, they may be able to provide teachers with guidance on how to prioritize instruction and provide realistic pacing guides that teachers can use to guide their planning. Another possibility is to further integrate writing across the curriculum so that writing is taught in all subjects and at all grade levels. This integration may help teachers perceive their time for writing instruction as more sufficient, since it is a part of instruction in other content areas.

A large majority (72%) of teachers in this study believed that access to curricular materials aligned with the CCSS would make them better prepared to teach the CCSS in Writing. This concern was echoed in teachers' responses to several questions throughout the survey. Thus, school leaders should prioritize securing the curricular resources that teachers need. If there are not sufficient funds to purchase new curricular materials, another option may be to provide time for teachers to collaboratively develop materials and learn from each other. Teachers in the current study believe it would be beneficial to see videos of teachers implementing the standards, live demonstrations from experts and colleagues, and/or samples of student work and assessments aligned with each standard. Some of these resources do exist and are becoming more readily available as more and more teachers work to implement the CCSS in Writing. Providing teachers with access to this information, as well as time to review and evaluate new resources, would be beneficial.

Balancing Positive and Negative Outcomes of Implementation

Our data revealed teachers differed greatly on their perceptions of the value and feasibility of the CCSS in Writing, but increased rigor and high expectations were widely reported as a positive outcome. Although the majority of teachers appreciated the increased rigor of the standards, many also had concerns about the developmental appropriateness of the standards for their individual students, and many shared concerns about how to differentiate instruction or adjust the pace while using the standards. In open-ended responses, several teachers indicated students do not have sufficient background knowledge to meet the rigor of the new standards. In essence, given the way writing may have been taught in the past, there is a potential gap between students' existing knowledge and abilities and the standards they are now expected to meet.

Closely related to the rigor of the standards, participating teachers indicated their belief that the CCSS in Writing are not appropriate for all students. They specifically expressed the concern that the standards may not be appropriate for English Language Learners (ELLs) and students who may not be performing on grade level. Additionally, teachers indicated that, overall, they are least prepared to teach the standards to ELLs and students with intellectual disabilities. This finding is consistent with previous research that new teachers often leave their teacher preparation programs ill-prepared to meet the needs of ELLs (Durgunoglu & Hughes, 2010). A lack of confidence in meeting the needs of diverse learners is also common in experienced teachers. A study by Forlin, Keen and Barrett (2008) found that over 90% of teachers surveyed believed they had received insufficient training to meet the needs of students with

intellectual disabilities; therefore, it is important that teachers are provided with training and experiences that will enable them to support diverse learners in meeting the CCSS in Writing.

Need for High Quality Professional Development

Teachers' concerns about teaching the CCSS in Writing are not surprising, given that the majority of teachers in the study (54%) reported receiving one day or less of professional development regarding the standards. Previous research indicates the success of an intervention often relies on both the quantity and quality of professional development received on the topic. For example, Hindman and Wasik (2012) found greater benefits for children's literacy learning when teachers were provided with two years versus just one year of training. Further, to be most effective, Darling Hammond (1996) argues that professional development should involve learning that is sustained and supported over time. Teachers need opportunities to reflect on their own work in collaboration with other teachers who provide alternative viewpoints and challenge one another's thinking. This is difficult to accomplish in one-day or half-day, stand-alone workshops, which teachers in the current study reported attending most frequently.

Further, professional development opportunities should include repeated exposure to new ideas, collaboration among peers, and learning opportunities that incorporate demonstration, practice, and coaching (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000; Lang & Fox, 2004). It may also be beneficial to provide teachers with feedback following professional development experiences to assist them in transferring their learning and understanding the impact of new strategies on their students' learning (Guskey, 2002).

Limitations

Since implementation of the CCSS in Writing is in its infancy, limited research exists on teachers' acceptability of the standards; therefore, this study relied heavily on previous research in the field of acceptability regarding general academic interventions. A second limitation of this study is the limited sampling region (constricted by the number of states that had fully implemented the standards at the time of data collection), which limits our ability to generalize the results to teachers across the nation. The amount of survey items could be viewed as a limitation, but by providing multiple response choices and chances for open-ended responses, we believe that we provided enough items to fully evaluate each topic. Finally, due to the sampling procedures, it was impossible to compute a response rate for this study.

Conclusions

This study aimed to examine teachers' perceptions about their preparedness to teach the CCSS in Writing, barriers to implementing the standards, positive and negative effects of CCSS implementation, and teachers' beliefs about their professional development experiences related to implementing the standards. The results of the analyses indicate that teachers vary in their current level of acceptability regarding the CCSS in Writing, but that the majority of teachers still struggle with their familiarity, preparedness, and perceived barriers to implementation. It is unlikely that teachers will implement the CCSS in Writing with fidelity if they do not believe the standards align with their own personal theories and beliefs about teaching writing, including their beliefs about what are appropriate or acceptable writing expectations for their students. Although teachers' beliefs are well established when they enter their first classroom, research suggests that teachers' beliefs evolve throughout their careers and that,

through effective professional development, desirable change can occur (Beswick, 2006; Ng, Nicholas & Williams, 2010).

Beyond just providing professional development to give teachers knowledge of the standards, our findings suggest that teachers need more time to explore the standards, identify high quality resources, and collaborate with one another. Given this information, a slower roll out of new initiatives may be helpful. Finally, effective leadership and support from administrators will be vital to teachers' success in teaching the CCSS. It is our goal that teachers' voices from this study will be used to directly inform future professional development opportunities as well as inform policy makers in states that have not yet fully implemented the standards.

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Table 1
Description of Teachers in Sample

Characteristic	n	Characteristic	n
Gender		Teaching (in years)	
Male	29 (9%)	*M*	13.85
Female	303 (91%)	*Mdn*	13
Age (in years)		*SD*	7.93
M	42.65	Range	1-30
MD	42.00	Grade Taught	
SD	11.36	K-3	41.2%
Range	22-68	4-5	11.6%
Ethnicity		6-8	18.8%
European American	282 (85%)	9-12	28.4%
African American	36 (11%)		
Latino	7 (2%)		
Other	7 (2%)		

Table 2
Teachers' Reported Familiarity and Confidence with the CCSS in Writing

	Response Option			
Survey Item	Not at all	Slightly	Somewhat	Very
How familiar are you with the CCSS writing standards?	6%	14%	45%	5%
How confident are you in your abilities to teach writing?	6%	10%	46%	38%
How prepared do you feel to teach using the CCSS Writing Standards?	10%	21%	46%	23%

Table 3
Teachers' Perceptions about their Needs for Preparation to Teach CCSS in Writing

Response Option	Percent Reporting
More information about how Common Core will change my instructional practice	34%

More information about how Common Core will change what is expected from my students	45%
Access to curricular resources aligned to Common Core	72%
Access to assessment resources aligned to Common Core	63%
More planning time	70%
More time to collaborate with colleagues	67%
More information about how Common Core Standards differ from my state standards prior to Common Core implementation	25%
Other	8%

Table 4
Teachers' Perceptions of Preparedness to Teach CCSS in Writing to Various Groups of Students

	Not at all prepared	Slightly prepared	Somewhat prepared	Very prepared
Students as a whole	6.1%	17.3%	51.6%	25.0%
English-Language Learners	28.3%	29.5%	30.8%	11.3%
Students with disabilities	24.7%	34.4%	30.4%	10.5%
Low-income students	9.0%	25.7%	43.7%	21.6%
Academically at-risk students	10.9%	34.4%	36.0%	18.6%
Gifted and talented students	11.4%	14.6%	40.2%	33.7%

Table 5
Teachers' Responses about Perceived Barriers to Implementing the CCSS in Writing

Response Option	Percent Responding
Not enough instructional time	68.7%
Lack of materials/resources needed	47.2%
Little or no training/professional development in this area	37.0%
Poor quality training/professional development in this area	15.4%
Little or no support from administration and/or school district	8.5%

Standards not supported by the curriculum used	27.2%
Classroom management issues/student behavior	24.4%
Other	11.8%

Table 6
Teachers' Open-Ended Responses about Perceived Barriers to Implementing CCSS in Writing

Category of Response	Example of Response	Percentage of All Responses
Insufficient Background Knowledge	"Many of my students have weak prerequisite skills to meet these standards at this level."	61.0%
Unrealistic Expectations for Students	"Students are not developmentally ready for this complexity of writing."	39.0%

Table 7
Open-Ended Responses about the Positive Effects of Implementing the CCSS in Writing

Response category	Example of Response	Percentage of all responses
Standards increase rigor of writing instruction	*"Common Core forces students to produce writings that give explicit textual evidence, and cite their findings. It also requires higher thinking skills when writing essay question by asking students to restate the main idea of the passage, validate their findings, and give examples and reasons to support those findings. This is definitely a step up from where we were last year."*	36.4%
Standards set high expectations	*"With higher expectations comes higher achievement. They can do it!"*	25.4%
Standards better prepare students for college, the work force, and beyond	*"I believe the new standards will better prepare my students for college and careers of their choice. The standards are concise and build at each grade level for a progression of skills to be developed."*	12.7%
Standards provide consistency in expectations across states	*"The standards are the same from state to state. The students will be able to perform at the same level as other students nationally."*	11.0%

Standards put emphasis on writing across the curriculum	*"Ensures writing across the curriculum and encourages higher level thinking for student writers."*	9.3%
Standards motivate the inner writer/help produce self confidence	*"It will prepare my students…for 3rd grade. It also motivates the inner writer to come out and that is always a treat to find."*	5.0%

Table 8
Open-Ended Responses about the Negative Effects of Implementing the CCSS in Writing

Response category	Example of Response	Percentage of all responses
Not enough time to implement in given amount of instructional time	"I feel that in my 2 1/2 hour literacy block (includes reading, small group instruction, grammar skills, and writing skills), that there is not enough time to teach all skills effectively."	30.4%
Standards are too complex, rigorous, or not developmentally appropriate	"They are not written clearly enough and are not 2nd grade appropriate. I do not teach high school students. EXPECTATIONS DO NOT MATCH THE REAL WORLD [caps in original] of a second grader."	24.8%
Not enough resources to fully implement	"WE HAVE NO RESOURCES [caps in original] to match these standards and there is no money to buy new resources. We are having to come up with everything from scratch (or buy our own out of our pocket which is what my team did for Writing)."	18.1%
Standards are not appropriate for diverse learners	"My kids don't know English and to expect them to be on a par with native speakers who have been in contact with English their whole lives is absolutely ludicrous."	10.5%
Students lack preparation from previous grades	"Students were not ready this year to jump into many of the standards. We must have Kindergarten step up their game for us to start out ready to learn at the level/pace required."	14.3%
Standards are difficult for teachers to interpret or understand	"The standards are very hard to figure out. They are not written clearly enough."	10.5%

Table 9
Reported Number of Days of Professional Development Received on the CCSS in Writing

Response Option	Percent Reporting
Less than 1 day	39%
1 day	15%
2-3 days	22%
4-5 days	11%
More than 5 days	13%

Table 10
Teachers' Responses Regarding Helpful Aspects of Current Professional Development

Response Category	Example	Percent Indicating Response
Nothing	"Nothing. My motto is, 'just let teachers teach.' When did teachers become so dumb? Teachers can plan and teach wonderful lessons without a ton of professional development. After all of the meetings we are tired and have no time left to plan."	26%
Opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the standards	"Breaking down the standards and identifying the meaning and how it applies to lessons."	22%
Strategies or examples for implementing	"[We were] given strategies to implement Common Core Writing and showed students' work on our grade level to confirm that students can do it."	21%
Opportunity to collaborate with colleagues	"Hearing from other teachers about what they do in class."	18%
Provided an introduction to the standards	"It was an entry level introduction to get us started and help us understand the expectations."	7%
Other	NA	6%

Table 11
Teachers Responses about Future Professional Development Topics

Response Category	Example of Response	Percent Indicating Response
Information about teaching specific types of writing	"I particularly need help with strategies to teach narrative techniques and opinion writing."	26
Differentiation or remediation	"Getting kids up to speed in order to address the CCSS ELA Writing standards." "Working with kids at-risk, special education, and English as a second language learners."	22
All related topics	"All topics."	16
Assessment	"I'd like to know more about how the standards are aligned specifically to the assessment instruments."	16
Using technology to support writing	"Using Technology -Edmodo and other platforms- to engage students in writing and thinking online."	12
Other	NA	8

Appendix A
Survey Items

How familiar are you with the Common Core State Standards in Writing?

How confident are you in your abilities to teach writing?

How prepared do you feel to teach using the Common Core State Standards in Writing?

Which of the following would help you feel better prepared to teach the Common Core State Standards in Writing?

What do you perceive as your main barriers in implementing the Common Core State Standards in Writing effectively?

List any additional barriers to implementation.

How prepared do you personally feel to teach the Common Core State Standards in Writing to the following groups of students:
      7a. Your students as a whole
      7b. ELL's
      7c. Students with disabilities
      7d. Low-income students

Please list any positive effects of implementing the Common Core State Standards in Writing for your students.

Please list any negative effects of implementing the Common Core State Standards in Writing for your students.

. How many days of professional development have you received on implementing the Common Core State Standards in Writing.

. What has been helpful about the professional development that you have received?

. What Common Core writing topics would you like additional information on in future professional development opportunities?