1 Introduction

A well-educated person has a well-furnished mind, shaped by reading and thinking about history, science, literature, the arts, and politics.

—Diane Ravitch, 2010, p. 16

The challenges of teaching in secondary education have been amplified since the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) initiative. More than ever before, teachers are being asked to examine their classroom practices and align them with the advancements in instruction as identified by the CCSS. Some of these advancements propose the inclusion of literacy skills and strategies in all areas of instruction with an overall expectation that these changes in classroom practices will bring about school reform.

For decades, school reform and the innovative approaches that lead to school improvement have been extensively examined (Hargreaves, 1994; Ravitch, 2000; Reeves, 2006), and the results have revealed that the implementation of many policies and practices have not been successful in improving student achievement even when educational change has been rigorously pursued (Fullan, 2007). In some instances, the improvement of teaching and learning has been viewed as an "only if" proposition—only if we had more qualified teachers, adequate funding, current technology, appropriate materials, better leadership . . . *only if.* Far worse is the impression that the fault lies somewhere among the perceived deficits in diverse student populations that more and more teachers find seated in their classrooms across our nation.

Of some concern is the notion that there are individual school entities that are lacking, their alteration will bring about desired educational outcomes, and the solution is for policymakers to mitigate circumstances

through legislation such as student assessment practices, teacher evaluation, or the selection of a new set of standards. Although there is no panacea, standards-based instruction is an opportunity to set a meaningful context to build challenging curricula and uphold rigorous expectations for all students, even those who are perceived as struggling learners.

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) clearly identify rigorous academic objectives and support teachers' high expectations for student performance. Yet in examining the Standards with a wide lens, we have found the CCSS challenge secondary teachers in numerous ways—to go beyond merely requiring students to receive information and recall content facts. The Standards emphasize a deeper understanding of text, including the development of students' abilities to collect, analyze, and synthesize information from a variety of sources as well as interpret data, infer meaning, and make connections among texts. In short, the development of these learning skills requires a different set of skills for teaching.

For the most part, the adoption of the CCSS alone is unlikely to bring about an increase in student achievement, and it remains to be seen how their implementation will fare with diverse learners. With broad concerns over the effectiveness of the CCSS as well as their implementation, Weingarten (2012) offered her opinion:

> The hard part is not the development of standards or their adoption, but the implementation. These standards must be supported by a comprehensive system that includes development of aligned curriculum; support and time for appropriate professional development; instructional materials and other resources including model lesson plans; collaborative planning efforts; and assessments that are aligned but must inform instruction and not be used excessively or punitively. (para. 2)

More than ever before, educational change in all its complexity rests within a teacher's classroom practices and the ability to collaborate concerning the materials and instructional resources chosen, the use of teaching approaches and strategies, and the alteration of pedagogical beliefs (Fullan, 2007; Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010). Nonetheless, the teaching process is impeded by the ways in which our schools are compartmentalized. Teachers concern themselves with their discipline-specific curriculum, and there may be limited opportunities to incorporate student learning from subject to subject. What is happening in the history class is

vastly different from the English language arts class, yet both require students to listen, speak, read, and write.

In his argument for science literacy, Trefil (2008) identified a problem with the nature of secondary school design. He commented that all too often, the school day is divided into discipline-specific classes, in which each content area is taught exclusive of any other subject. As teachers, we do not take the opportunity to carry over the learning students accumulate from one class to another, and we almost never consider incorporating material from multiple classes so that courses such as chemistry, biology, art history, and mathematics have a common thread.

The practice of compartmentalized curricula may be detrimental to the learning of all students in that it does not foster students' abilities to draw on previously learned information across the disciplines or make complex, meaningful connections between content classes. This division of subject matter particularly impacts the success of diverse learners, who with their special learning needs are not only trying to make sense of academic content but also in some cases must navigate a mainstream American school culture due to ethnic, social, and language differences.

Overall, the CCSS present an unprecedented opportunity for secondary school educators to examine their current instructional practices and align them to the new standards. To assist with planning new types of instruction, we look to Fullan (2007) who identified three key features to establish new initiatives: (a) the adoption of new material resources for instructional purposes, (b) the application of different teaching strategies, and (c) the amendment of practitioners' pedagogical or theoretical beliefs; all three elements are necessary to successfully establish particular program implementation. However, despite the establishment of all three of these components, other issues can influence the effective foundation of new educational initiatives. What is needed is a comprehensive plan of implementation that incorporates leadership strategies, buy-in from the school community, alignment of the curricula, and adequate professional development.

With consideration for the academic, linguistic, ethnic, racial, cultural, and economic backgrounds of diverse learners, educators should approach the employment of the CCSS as a multidimensional task. School administrators in particular should take into account the complexities of implementation, encompass various approaches to the challenges, collaboratively analyze the issues, and develop an overall plan of action. From our perspective, successful implementation will require the following:

1. A shared vision and mission for all students reached through consensus along with the determination of measurable, achievable goals with an understanding of how to accomplish them

2. Curriculum mapping and alignment to ensure that instructional content and practices for academically and linguistically diverse pupils are consistent with the Standards and the learning outcomes for all students

3. Collaborative planning, instruction, and assessment among teams of teachers—content-area, English as a second language (ESL), special education, and literacy specialists, among others—to foster the use of teaching and learning strategies to make academic material comprehensible for all learners

4. Strategies to integrate language and content instruction to foster literacy and language development while acquiring content information (as well as professional development opportunities for teachers to become proficient with such strategies)

5. A direct focus on teaching academic language and literacy needed to access rigorous content and opportunities for students to apply newly learned language and content-based literacy skills through various modes of discourse

6. Explicitly teaching literacy and language-learning strategies to develop students' understanding of their own thinking and learning processes and help them develop as self-directed, independent learners who are college and career ready

By fostering a comprehensive plan for implementation of the CCSS with the needs of diverse learners in mind, school administrators will be better able to support teachers in their efforts to promote students' success in meeting the Standards.

WHO ARE OUR NOT-SO-COMMON LEARNERS?

It is no surprise that in the 21st century, U.S. classrooms are filled with students that are more culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse than ever before. Yet the nature of school systems, in particular, the way we assess our students, has a tendency to create segregated populations of learners in the same school building. The purpose of segregating diverse students—English learners, students with disabilities, or those in need of other instructional support services—is to target their instruction. Middle

school and high school classes often support the learning of these diverse groups with specialized classes and curricula developed to help these students meet with success. However, all too often the curricula of tracked courses or stand-alone specialized secondary programs generally set particularly low expectations for these students to meet, and the curricula for these classes do not always offer the same rigor as those set for mainstream classes. Often coupled with low expectations for them, when diverse students are labeled and segregated from the mainstream classroom, their abilities, language, and culture are subject to "subtle forms of unintentional rejection" (Cummins, 2001, p. 2).

Our main objective for defining the *not-so-common learner* is not to add to the divisiveness or segregation of these pupils. In our inclusion and description of them, we hope that teachers and administrators will be better able to plan for the education of diverse students so that they may meet with success in their coursework and provide the appropriate resources, strategies, and techniques, many of which are outlined in this volume, to assist their learning.

The following are a list of the common characteristics and labels often associated with the not-so-common learner:

- English Learners (ELs). These are students who are either foreign-born immigrants or U.S.-born citizens of immigrant parents, speak a language other than English, and have yet to develop proficient skills (listening, speaking, reading, or writing) in English.
- Students With Interrupted or Limited Formal Education (SIFE). A subgroup of English learners, these school-age youngsters often have significant gaps in their education and, on the average, two years or less schooling than their same-age peers.
- Students With Disabilities. Pupils with special learning needs due to physical and/or mental impairments who require special assistance to meet with academic success.
- Nonstandard-English-Speaking Children. Often racially and/or ethnically diverse, these U.S.-born students speak a dialect of English in their communities and have yet to acquire standard American English skills.
- Children of Poverty. Youngsters under the age of 18 whose families have incomes below the U.S. poverty threshold. Approximately 16 million of America's poor are children who are often malnourished, live in substandard housing, and have unequal access to education opportunities.
- Struggling Learners. Students who are not performing at grade level in the core subject matters.

THE STANDARDS MOVEMENT

Thirty years after the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), a comprehensive report concerning the quality of education in America, 46 U.S. states have joined together to adopt a foundation for educational reform with the CCSS initiative. However, there is frequent debate about the benefits of standards, particularly when so many variables affect educational reforms and student outcomes. One point of view is that standards are secondary to the issue of funding in that "arguing about what standards should be taught in school is of dubious value when the resources that teachers and students will have at their disposal will vary so deeply, district to district" (Lehman, 2012, para. 5). Funding certainly is crucial to educational reforms and to implementing positive systemic change. Monies are essential to employ highly qualified teachers, to provide effective professional development, to reduce class size, and to incorporate the latest instructional technology. Therefore, it is a simple conclusion that standards alone will not alter the learning outcomes.

Nevertheless, based on the research of quality standards found both in the United States and high-performing countries globally regarding what students need to know and be able to do to become college and career ready, the CCSS can be a strong foundation for school reform. Considering the overall benefits of well-established standards, Reeves (2000) stated the following:

> Although standards alone are clearly an insufficient instrument for the improvement of student achievement, the essence of standards—the clear articulation of what students should know and be able to do—forms the basis for the essential transformations necessary for school success. (p. 5)

Yet resistance to standards and certain accountability measures continues to surface as educators debate what might bring about lasting school success (Rowan, Correnti, Miller, & Camburn, 2009), along with other obstacles—cultural, traditional, political, and economic—that impede their implementation (Thomas, 2002).

The institution of educational reforms is a complex process, and it is vital that educational policies translate into sound classroom practices so that all children are supported in the learning process. Standards must be the framework that guides the inclusion and educational advancement of all students. To make educational reforms a reality, there must be an investment in quality teacher training (Elmore, 2008) and capacity

building through collaborative practices (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010) to foster the necessary skills for teachers and school-level administrators to undertake the challenge of meeting the needs of diverse learners.

COMMON CORE ADVANCES

The *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/ Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (2010a)—the Standards—identify several advances in instruction for not only the teaching of English language arts but also for the teaching of literacy skills during content-area instruction, a considerable shift in classroom practices for many secondary school teachers. This advancement was developed to truly ensure that all students are college and career ready by the end of Grade 12. For this reason, the CCSS contain sets of anchor standards in reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language that are consistent across all grade levels and promote an integrated model of literacy, and in Grades 6–12 specify a separate set of grade-level standards that solely focus on building reading and writing skills in the content areas.

This major shift in classroom practices, the teaching of literacy as a shared responsibility, is an outstanding promotion for the teaching and learning of diverse students as all teachers are expected to foster students' reading and writing skills across the disciplines. Furthermore, in Grades 6–12, there is an increased emphasis on the reading of nonfiction texts in conjunction with an interdisciplinary approach to the teaching of literacy. This emphasis on reading is based on extensive research establishing the necessary skills to comprehend informational texts proficiently and prepare students to be college and career ready.

To advance students' facility with reading informational texts, teachers may no longer solely deliver content information to students through direct instruction. Teachers therefore must shift their practices to assist students in gathering their own information about subject content through thoughtful, deep reading as well as through guided and independent research, and by participating in meaningful academic conversations and sustained collaborations with peers. Furthermore, to enhance the content learning and literacy development of diverse students, teachers will determine how to scaffold instruction to support the reading and analysis of complex texts as well as written responses with those youngsters who are not yet able to read or express themselves on grade level.

Teachers will need to focus their instruction so students read more closely and deeply in order to participate in text-dependent conversations.

The CCSS specify that students' opinions, arguments, and conclusions must be grounded in text-based evidence. To support evidence-based conversations with diverse learners, teachers will need to activate students' prior knowledge, build background information from students' personal experiences, and motivate students through their personal connections with the topic in order to aid their comprehension of text and enhance their ability to participate in meaningful conversations. Or as a recent report indicated, "Some students, particularly those with LDs, require sustained and intensive combinations of classroom instruction, remediation, and accommodations that are individualized, explicit, systematic, and relevant" (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 2008, para. 27).

An additional advancement in instruction due to the CCSS is the level and complexity of student writing. Secondary students are expected to write arguments that are supported by ample text-based evidence and compose explanatory texts that convey complex ideas, compiling information obtained through multiple print and digital sources. Students must discern the value of information obtained from various sources and to develop a facility with using technology to generate and publish individually written work as well as codevelop shared writing projects.

One final broad-based shift in instruction initiated by the Standards is a direct emphasis on the explicit teaching of academic vocabulary. For students to consistently be able to comprehend complex texts, all content teachers should identify vocabulary that most frequently appears in text across disciplines and grade levels, carefully explain strategies for understanding new vocabulary during the different phases of reading (before, during, and after), associate new words with previously known or learned vocabulary, and focus students on key objectives for reading to emphasize clear tasks. With diverse learner needs in mind, the shared reading of short, complex texts is an invaluable opportunity for teachers to stress not only key academic vocabulary but also the understanding of content by analyzing meaning at both the sentence and text levels.

The changes in teaching responsibilities and instruction as identified by the CCSS will present a new set of challenges for secondary teachers and administrators. A comprehensive plan of implementation of the CCSS coupled with adequate ongoing support should be in place so that all teachers have the opportunity to develop their literacy-building skills across the disciplines. Additionally, curriculum should be mapped and aligned to the CCSS in order for teachers to have

a usable guide that includes built-in time to conduct close, careful reading with grade-level text.

WHAT IS NOT COVERED IN THE COMMON CORE DOCUMENT

To better understand the implications of the CCSS for academically and linguistically diverse pupils, it is critical that all educators read the Introduction (pp. 3–7) of the *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects* (2010a), even if their main instructional focus is not teaching English language arts. The beginning pages of the CCSS document contain information not only on the development of the Standards but also on what they are and are not. To this end, we would like to identify the design limitations or clear boundaries of the CCSS. Our main purpose for underscoring these boundaries is to eliminate any misinterpretations about the Standards:

- The CCSS were created to ensure that students are college and career ready. By design, they identify what students should know and be able to do. However, the Standards do not specify any particular curriculum to be taught or the techniques and strategies teachers must use to teach students.
- The Standards describe only the essential skills that must be taught; it is beyond the scope of the CCSS to identify "all that can and should be taught" (*Common Core State Standards,* 2010a, p. 6). Therefore, curriculum that addresses only the Standards, in our estimation, is not a complete curriculum.
- The methods, materials, and instructional interventions necessary to foster academic growth with students who are not yet working at grade level or the nature of assignments for students working above grade-level expectations are not specified by the Standards.
- The instructional supports necessary for English learners or students with disabilities to succeed are not specified by the Standards. In our opinion, teachers must continue to apply research-based strategies, best practices, and appropriate accommodations for working with these student populations while not compromising rigor and relevance.
- The Standards do not address the necessary social, emotional, physical, and cultural growth of students to be college and career ready.

It is clear that the CCSS outline essential skills and guidelines for educators to build curricula. However, they are limited in scope and should not be the sole guide for all that can and should be taught. Furthermore, teachers should be able to maintain a certain sense of autonomy when making instructional decisions concerning what is best for their students to meet with success.

APPLICATION OF THE COMMON CORE TO ADDRESS INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

The structure and organization of the CCSS document can assist teachers to differentiate instruction for diverse learners. All grade-level standards are carefully aligned to a corresponding set of anchor standards. These anchor standards are the same for all grade levels. As a result of this congruence, students who may not yet be able to meet a particular standard on grade level may still develop the same skills and concepts as specified in the same standard on a lower grade level. In this way, teachers may maintain the same or similar lesson objectives for all students yet differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of individual learners.

We strongly believe the Standards are an opportunity for all learners to have access to rigorous curriculum and high-quality instruction, elements that may not have always been present in the teaching of special student populations. Be that as it may, it will not be an easy task for all educators to maintain high expectations and provide essential differentiated and individualized instruction to progress students working below grade level. In support of developing these much needed practices, Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010) identified a set of guidelines, which include the following:

- Teachers have a responsibility to ensure that all their students master important content.
- Teachers have to make specific and continually evolving plans to connect each learner with key content.
- Teachers are required to understand the nature of each of their students, in addition to the nature of the content they teach.
- A flexible approach to teaching "makes room" for student variance.
- Teachers should continually ask, "What does this student need at this moment in order to be able to progress with this key content, and what do I need to do to make it happen?" (p. 15)

As a part of strengthening instructional practices, teachers to some degree must reexamine their overall beliefs about the abilities, strengths, and value of the diverse learners they teach. If these students are perceived as limited, their progress will remain in jeopardy. Similarly, if teachers maintain that diverse learners are an integral part of both their school and overall community, then these students' differences will be celebrated as an opportunity for all stakeholders to learn from their varied cultural viewpoints, their personal struggles, and individual triumphs.

STUDENT DIVERSITY AND TEACHER CHALLENGES

We anticipate that all teachers will be challenged to some degree with the task of identifying, planning, and executing effective instruction to meet the Standards. Coupled with multiple competing initiatives being implemented in districts at the same time, much teacher anxiety about the onset of the CCSS is due to changes in the curriculum, service delivery, program models, instructional practices, adopted program materials, and state as well as local assessments, not to mention teacher evaluation that is tied to student progress. As if it were not overwhelming enough, enter into the mix the needs of special populations of youngsters.

It is certain that classroom practices in light of the Common Core may no longer remain status quo. However, to meet the ever-growing challenges of instructing diverse student groups, teachers can no longer afford to work in isolation. Teachers will need guidance as well as honest feedback on how to scaffold instruction in content-area classes so that struggling readers or those who have not yet gained grade-level academic proficiency in English can have access to complex texts. In addition, they will need support to provide the necessary strategies to assist students to write arguments based on textual evidence texts and teach essential academic vocabulary even though some students have yet to develop basic vocabulary and concepts.

There is little doubt why some teachers are apprehensive about the implementation of the CCSS, particularly with diverse learners. Teachers might perceive that much of the understanding of new initiatives is often left to them to investigate and execute on their own. Furthermore, those who experience a lack of support at the school or district level have great concerns in terms of the necessary resources or training to effectively achieve the Standards. Additionally, they need time to tackle the groundwork for the following:

- Identifying how to meet the grade-level Standards with diverse student populations
- Interpreting what the CCSS mean for severely learning disabled youngsters
- Understanding how to execute the CCSS with emergent bilingual students
- Applying the CCSS to students with interrupted formal education (SIFE)
- Creating CCSS-aligned units of learning for students working below grade level

The key to meeting the multiple challenges of diverse students is true collaboration (DuFour, 2003) in which teachers can engage in honest talk about their practices, take risks to apply new strategies, and foster collective accountability for all student learning. We discuss collaborative practices in greater detail in Chapter 7.

FOCUS ON RESEARCH-BASED STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS LEARNING NEEDS

The implementation of the CCSS is being interpreted in various ways by different state educational agencies, public school districts, private learning institutions, and individual educators. Some interpretations on how to incorporate the Standards into classroom practices may be misguided, especially when applying the Standards to working with diverse learners. It is therefore essential to note that the only course for adequately addressing the CCSS is through the examination and high-quality, rigorous implementation of research-based and evidence-based best practices for special student populations. As a result, we take this opportunity to identify some general guidelines and techniques for best practices in teaching diverse learners as follows:

- Base instruction not only on standards and curriculum but also on evidence of student learning.
- Implement instruction that is systematic and explicit, breaking down complex tasks and teaching with a step-by-step approach.
- Monitor students' progress and identify candidates for small-group instruction or individualized intervention in order to preteach and reteach information, skills, and strategies.
- Develop students' abilities to manage their own learning through organizational techniques (structured guides, graphic organizers, etc.).

- Provide information through alternative formats: audio, video, and multimedia presentations.
- Scaffold speech so that complex sentences and academic vocabulary are supported through the repetition of information using less complex sentences.
- Increase instructional time for students to process information.
- Increase student engagement by having students work in cooperative learning groups.
- Maintain a low-anxiety learning environment.
- Build on students' strengths instead of their perceived deficits.

Additionally, Fisher and Frey (2008) offered their own framework for delivering instruction to enhance student understanding and gradually increase student independence. Their model of structured teaching, based in part on the gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), is as follows:

1. Focus lesson: Teachers begin by setting a purpose for the lesson and modeling a skill, strategy, or learning task.

2. Guided instruction: Students have the opportunity to practice alongside the teacher; instruction during this phase of the lesson can be differentiated.

3. Student collaboration: Students work in cooperative learning groups to engage in meaningful activities and problem solve to gain a clearer understanding of the purpose of the lesson.

4. Independent practice: Students are released to work on their own to apply what they have learned.

Classroom instruction that follows this framework provides diverse learners with various structured occasions to be exposed to information, vocabulary, and language practice before having to perform tasks on their own.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Considering current educational trends, the inclusion of diverse learners in mainstream classes is far more likely to increase than decline, and the implementation of the CCSS will no doubt continue to be a challenging and multidimensional task for all educators. However, it is certain that with the onset of the CCSS, there needs to be multiple, collaborative

discussions among all stakeholders and agreed-upon actions for how to best prepare teachers to foster success with diverse populations of youngsters—to carefully examine curricula, resources, materials, and classroom practices in order to afford the learning of all students and provide the necessary time and professional development to support teacher learning. To this end, the following chapters offer sets of essential strategies that address each anchor standard that furnish teachers in Grades 6–12 with the necessary tools for addressing the needs of diverse students.