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## Examining English Language Arts Common Core State Standards Instruction through Cultural Historical Activity Theory

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**Abstract:** The English Language Arts Common Core State Standards and corresponding assessments brought about many changes for educators, their literacy instruction, and the literacy learning of their students. This study examined the day-to-day literacy instruction of two primary grade teachers during their first year of full CCSS implementation. Engeström's Third Generation Cultural Historical Activity Theory is utilized as both a theoretical framework and a method for analysis to provide a rich description of the complex environment in which literacy instruction and learning occur. The ELA standards functioned as the primary objects of literacy instruction and literacy learning activities are discussed within the context of the larger cultural framework where the teachers interpret and implement these standards. Findings from this study illuminate the complex and interrelated influences of ELA CCSS, and reveal the power of the individual teacher in constructing the literacy learning opportunities.

**Keywords:** English language arts; Common Core State Standards; literacy instruction; curriculum; cultural historical activity theory.

**Examinando los Estándares Estatales de Inglés del Programa Common Core a Través de la Teoría de la Actividad Histórico-Cultural**

**Resumen:** los estándares estatales de inglés (ELA) del programa Common Core (CCSS) y las evaluaciones correspondientes trajeron muchos cambios para los educadores, los programas de alfabetización y el aprendizaje de la lectoescritura de los estudiantes. Este estudio examinó la enseñanza de la lectoescritura en el día a día de dos maestros de primaria durante su primer año de aplicación plena de los CCSS. Utilizamos la teoría de la actividad Histórico Cultural de Tercera Generación de Engeström tanto como marco teórico y método de análisis para proporcionar una descripción rica del entorno complejo en el que se producen la alfabetización y el aprendizaje. Los estándares ELA funcionaban como los objetos principales de las actividades de instrucción y las tareas de alfabetización se discuten en un contexto de un marco cultural más amplio, donde los profesores interpretan y aplican estas normas. Los hallazgos de este estudio iluminan las influencias complejas e interrelacionadas de los ELA y los CCSS, y revelan el poder de cada profesor en la construcción de las oportunidades de aprendizaje de alfabetización.

**Palabras clave:** inglés; Estándares Estatales Comunes; alfabetización; plan de estudios; teoría de la actividad histórico-cultural.

### **Examinando os Critérios Estaduais de Inglês do Programa Common Core Através da Teoria da Atividade Histórico-Cultural**

**Resumo:** Critérios estaduais de inglês (ELA) do Common Core (CCSS) e os programas de monitoramento relacionadas trouxeram muitas mudanças para os educadores, os programas de alfabetização e para alfabetização dos alunos. Este estudo examinou o cotidiano no ensino de alfabetização dois professores da escola primaria durante o primeiro ano de implementação dos CCSS. Nós usamos a teoria da atividade Histórico Cultural Terceira Geração de Engeström tanto como referencial teórico e método de análise para fornecer uma descrição rica do ambiente complexo em que ocorrem a alfabetização e aprendizagem. As normas ELA funcionavam como o principal objetos de instrução e tarefas de alfabetização são discutidos no contexto de um contexto cultural mais amplo, onde os professores interpretam e aplicam regras. Os resultados deste estudo iluminam as influências complexas e interrelacionados das ELA e os CCSS, e revelam o poder de cada professor na construção de oportunidades de aprendizagem alfabetização.

**Palavras-chave:** inglês; Critérios do núcleo comum; alfabetização; currículo; teoria da atividade histórico-cultural.

## **Introduction**

Forty-five states initially adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and were given freedom to select a standardized assessment for measuring mastery of these standards: the PARCC, Smarter Balanced, or their own CCSS framed assessment. Selected CCSS assessments soon resulted in the adaptation of current State and County standardized testing measures. This study uses a Cultural Historical Activity Theory framework and analysis to examine how teachers enact policy into practice as the English Language Arts (ELA) CCSS are implemented into literacy instruction and students literacy learning opportunities within two primary grade classrooms.

### **A Historical Look at Standardization**

The long road to standardizing children's literacy learning has continually been influenced by factors outside of the classroom. Political interest and control of curricula are not new to this decade, or even century. As early as 1892, College preparation has also been historically linked to standardizing educational curricula objectives, when the Committee of Ten (presidents of

universities working as part of the National Education Association) convened to determine the goals of the curriculum and were later adjusted in 1918 to make curriculum more adaptable to everyday use and not solely a means of college preparation, thus beginning the movement for career readiness. In the 1950s the federal government first took a hand in issuing national policies towards education. When the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown vs. Board of Education* in 1954, the federal government took its first official step towards creating policy for all state educational systems (McGuinn, 2006). Federal involvement in curriculum standards, and funding allocations, continued to increase as improvement in education became a platform for national defense during the Space Race of the 1950s and 1960s (Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 1992). The era of federal policy and global politics continued through the Cold War, with Carter's 1979 creation of a cabinet-level Department of Education, Reagan's report of *A Nation at Risk* (1983), Clinton's envisioning common requirements in the 1990s for Goals 2000, Bush's call for uniform expectations and goals of achievement and accountability in 2002's NCLB, and Race To the Top (RTTT) in 2009. RTTT further encouraged a unification of standards for instruction and assessment for the 40 racing states.

In 2010, the Common Core State Standards Initiative, sponsored by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School (CCSSO), released English language arts (CCSS ELA) and mathematics standards for kindergarten through twelfth grades. The goal of the standards initiative was to provide educators, parents, and students with consistent, rigorous, knowledge-based skills to prepare students for entering college and the American work force (CCSS Initiative Mission Statement, <http://www.corestandards.org/>). Teacher preparation for CCSS instruction varied widely across states, districts, and schools as there was no general consensus or method for CCSS implementation (Desimone, 2013), leaving one to ponder the effectiveness of the enactment of this most recent standards-based reform (Sawchuk, 2012).

### **Policy in the Enacted Curriculum**

The enacted curriculum, as defined by Remillard and Bryans (2004), is the co-construction of classroom events by teachers and students. They suggest the critical component to the enacted curriculum is the teacher's "interpreting and responding to the words and actions of the students" (p. 355). Teachers' beliefs and interpretations about policy, standards, curriculum, instruction, and students critically influence daily instruction. This individualization of standards instruction implies the enacted curriculum is, in part, a product of the bi-directional relationship between policy and standards and the teachers who implement them.

Policy is shaped and interpreted as it travels from national and state arenas to districts, schools, and the individual classroom. Teachers construct policy messages as individuals in professional communities, making decisions about how to apply policies into classroom instruction. Personalization of the enacted curriculum implies that teachers exhibit an understanding that students' needs differ, and curricular legislation cannot construct a single method to meet diverse needs of all students in the classroom (Paris, 2001). This study examines how two elementary school teachers implement the ELA CCSS into their literacy instruction based on their own experiences within the educational communities to which they belong, and their own personal perceptions of the ELA standards and literacy learning.

### **Theoretical Framework: Cultural Historical Activity Theory**

A sociocultural theory, such as Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), is appropriate for the study of literacy and literacy curricula, as literacy education itself may be seen as a cultural-ideological practice (Kostogriz, 2000). An activity may be viewed as a

historically, culturally, and socially situated action in which people are engaged towards a shared objective, and in the case of this study, a literacy learning objective (Fisher, 2011).

Vygotsky's activity model included a subject, the subject's object (objective), and the tools or artifacts one uses to attain the object. Leont'ev's second generation CHAT theory provides that subjects, as individuals within the community, possess certain perspectives influenced by the subjects' relationship and interactions within the greater community (Engeström & Cole, 1997). Thus an activity, or event around a certain objective, can be analyzed from the individual's level at the personal stage of interaction as well as within the larger social network.

The original model of mediating theory focused mainly on the subject (be it singular or plural), the objective goal, and the artifacts used for mediation. It did not greatly account for the larger context in which the activity occurs. To examine practice-bound cognition, examinations of both the collective group and individual perspectives within the greater social context are necessary. Researching only at the social level may take away from the perspectives of the individuals, and research only from the individual level leaves out the community (Engeström & Cole, 1997)—both are important.

Leont'ev's second generation of theory added a second step between individual action and community activity. Leont'ev's theory provides that subjects, as individuals within the community, are possessing of perspective, including the subjects' relationship and interactions with the greater community. The subject focus is the top of the triangle that represents Vygotsky's original subject, object, and artifact mediation. The social, or community focus, occurs in the bottom of the mediational triangle demonstrating how the subject relates to the community, divisions of labor within that community (the fixing of a particular job for individual based on society), and what rules are involved in the interactions (Center for Research on Activity Development and Learning-CRADLE, n.d.).

Though the second generation activity theory aimed to examine both the individual and collective, but lacked the ability to demonstrate the social context and culture in which the activity occurred (Cole, 1996). The culture of one community or individual may, may not, or may only partially reflect that of other subjects within the activity; the complexities of which could not be examined in the first two CHAT models.

Engeström proposed the third, and most recent, generation of activity theory (Figure 1, Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research, n.d. ). The third generation from Engeström blends Bakhtin's ideas about language as being inseparable from social and history factors and Leont'ev's concept of activity (Engeström, 2001). Engeström and Cole (1997) use third generation CHAT to incorporate many activity systems for analysis, allowing for diversity and dialogue to play its part upon the whole.

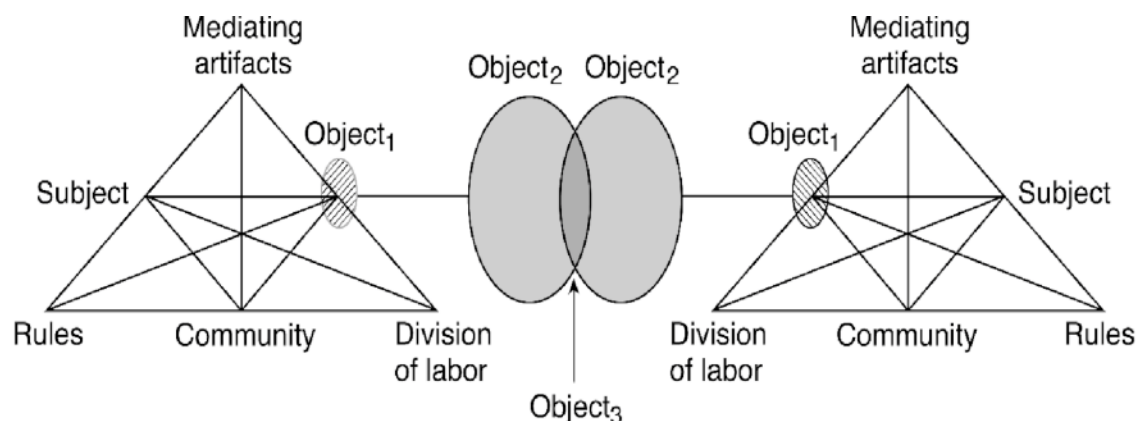


Figure 1. Third generation CHAT model.

Third generation CHAT provides for the joining, or intersecting, of two activity systems (ex. classroom students and educators) working towards individual and collective goals. The merger of the two activities creates a third object as tension occurs between objects of the first and second systems, allowing for mediation to occur in the zone of proximal development, which has the possibility of leading to new meaning making and expansive learning opportunities (Engeström, 1999). This study uses the third generation CHAT as both a theoretical framework and method of analysis. CHAT is a unique framework that allows researchers to examine the implementation of the ELA CCSS at multiple community levels, and how the communities and subjects within influence the implementation process. CHAT's activity systems analysis allows for the simultaneous examination of the ELA CCSS within the teacher's literacy instruction and the students' literacy learning activity systems by using narratives from these two activity systems that serve as the unit of analysis.

### CHAT as a Research Framework for Enacted Education Policies

Educational policies implementation varies across geographic locations, schools, and classrooms, providing widely varied ways of presenting the same curriculum (Butler & Allen, 2008; Loeb, Knapp, & Elfers, 2008). Educational policy development and implementation is a top down process that gets touched, and filtered, by the many individuals it passes on the way down to teachers' individual interactions with students. CHAT examines teaching and learning within and across systems, focusing on subjects within the community and culture; therefore, CHAT has great potential for educational research and policy enactment (Roth & Lee, 2007).

The proposed study investigated how literacy curricula are enacted during a time in which new curricular standards (i.e., the CCSS) are being introduced. Researchers such as Garcia, Edwards, and Lee recognize the need for examining curricula and educational models from a CHAT framework. Garcia's (2011) investigation of science curriculum pointedly argues that curricula cannot be viewed as separate from cultural and social reproductions of goals. Edwards (2010) agrees that educators base expectations for student learning on cultural and societal beliefs about what children need and can do.

CHAT allows a glimpse at a larger picture of past and present and culture and history to examine a direction for the future, and thus should be considered as research that can lead towards informing curriculum reform. Lee (2011) presents a marked use of CHAT to study educational reform in standardizing curriculum in the area of science. In Singapore, the science curriculum was mandated to be taught through inquiry-based model for all middle school students. Lee highlights CHAT's ability to show change in practice and learning due to mandated curricular change. His

research results focused on the motives and power of stakeholders, teacher conformity and contradictions to mandated assessments of curriculum, and examined practices involved in the change of practices in the enacted curriculum.

There is a paucity of research that uses a CHAT framework for investigating curricular policy implementation in literacy, specifically in early elementary and intermediate grades. Fisher (2011) presents a high quality example of research around mandated curriculum implementation using Leont'ev's second-generation CHAT framework. Fisher's study explores activity involved in writing education around the Talk to Text Project in England and the relationship between talk and writing in children ages five to seven. Fisher investigated the development of the project within four teacher's classrooms during year one of the study, and an additional two (total of 6) in year two. Fisher used 24 hours of videoed observations and semi-structured audio taped interviews with the teachers, analyzing the data through activity systems analysis. Results focused on the teachers' actions and learning within the activity around teaching in the new curriculum program, and were presented on the societal, institutional, and individual teacher perspectives. Fisher's study illustrates the need for further CHAT research in understanding how teachers act as subjects within a system's mandated curriculum implementation.

My study contributes towards understanding the implementation of a mandated and almost universal standards-based curriculum in that it uses Engeström's third generation CHAT model to explore the complex political and social process of how policy becomes practice. Engeström's CHAT model is also ideal for investigating the implementation of the ELA CCSS at the classroom level. Unlike previous research using second generation chat to examine curricular implementation and literacy instruction, this framework allows for the examination of interactions between teachers and students (as subjects) by focusing on the literacy learning objectives and opportunities that exist when these two activity systems meet. Third generation CHAT provides a lens for examining CCSS-based literacy instruction that takes into consideration interactional social and cultural factors: a) the communities to which the subjects belong, b) rules and roles within the classroom and greater communities, c) goals or objectives, d) and the artifacts used to achieve the goals.

## **Methods**

CHAT acts as both the theoretical framework and the method for analysis of literacy learning activities within this study. When using CHAT as a method for analysis, narratives from case study observations are selected as the unit for activity systems analysis (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). My use of CHAT in data collection and analysis is detailed in the section following the context of this study.

### **Context**

Tiger Creek Elementary (all names are pseudonyms) is a suburban school on the fringes of one of the largest Southeastern cities of the U.S., and served 840 children. I also selected Tiger Creek due to its student diversity: 56% Caucasian, 32% Asian, 4% Hispanic, and 4% African American. Twenty percent of the students spoke a home language other than English. Females represented 46% of the student population. Tiger Creek recently lost its Title 1 status due to quickly changing demographics.

### **Participants**

Study participants included a principal, two classroom teachers, and all students in each classroom (N=49). Teacher participants were selected based on multiple factors. First, only teachers in first and second grade were eligible for study participation. Kindergarten classrooms were not

considered due to the unique teaching environment and objectives for kindergarten (e.g., socialization and familiarity with the school culture). Third through fifth grade teachers were excluded due to their additional focus on State assessments, which, until the release of PARCC in 2014-2015, remained the State's criterion reference test. Second, only experienced teachers having taught in their current grade level in this district for three or more years were considered. Finally, teachers who had full time educational assistance in their classroom were excluded from consideration (e.g., teachers with student teachers/interns, full time paraprofessionals, or daily licensed support teacher). Teachers with part time instructional assistants, or paraprofessionals, were not excluded as all first grade classrooms at this school had instructional assistants for a portion of each day.

In addition, the school principal participated in a single interview to gather background data on how the staff was informed about ELA CCSS and how the staff was responding to the ELA CCSS requirements. This interview provided an administrative perspective at decision making within the County about how the CCSS entered the schools and what professional development supported its implementation. She had three years of experience at the school as an administrator and was a teacher within the County in years previous.

**Ms. Gabe (first grade).** Ms. Gabe was in her fourth year of teaching first grade. In her 16 years of teaching she had taught 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, Pre-K, and Early Intervention grades. She has a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and certification for Pre-K-5 and gifted education. Ms. Gabe was the first grade chair and a member of both the County's Literacy and Leadership and Literacy Assessment teams.

Ms. Gabe had 22 children in her first grade class. The class was ethnically diverse, with slightly more than a third of her students identifying as Asian, two as Hispanic, and Ms. Gabe and the remainder of the students are Caucasian. Of her 22 first graders, four had a home language other than English. Three students had Individual Education Plans (IEP's), one for verbal processing difficulties and two with Attention Deficit Disorder. In addition three other students were currently progressing through the Response to Intervention (RtI) process with a Student Support Team.

**Ms. McCree.** Ms. McCree was in her fourth year of teaching second grade. Before teaching second grade she taught in kindergarten for seven years. Ms. McCree also has a bachelor's in Early Childhood Education. She is a member of the County's CCSS Math Leadership team as well as the County's GAP team, which tours schools in the county observing teachers and providing professional feedback on how well their instruction met curriculum requirements.

Ms. McCree had 27 students in her second grade class; 11 were bilingual. Ms. McCree (Caucasian) had an ethnically diverse class, including children identifying as Caucasian, Asian, and Hispanic. A few had recently moved from Kuwait, China, and Korea. Four of her students had IEP's for speech, and one for occupational therapy.

A case comparison description summary of Ms. Gabe and Ms. McCree appears in Table 1.



Table 1  
*Case Comparison of Teacher Participants*

Teacher	Ms. Gabe (First Grade)	Ms. McCree (Second Grade)
Characteristics		
Teaching Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1<sup>st</sup> grade</li> <li>• 4<sup>th</sup> grade</li> <li>• Early Intervention (16 years)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kindergarten</li> <li>• 2<sup>nd</sup> grade</li> <li>• GAP team member (11 years)</li> </ul>
CCSS Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ELA Representative for school</li> <li>• ELA Assessment team member</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MATH Representative for school</li> </ul>
Professional Learning Preferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preferred leadership and practice readings</li> <li>• Attending professional seminars and workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflection over summer</li> <li>• Learn new materials for instructional use</li> <li>• Communicate with other teaching professionals through online venues</li> </ul>
Literacy Learning Beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children learn literacy by having access to repeated exposure to authentic texts, and participating in meaningful activities with those texts.</li> <li>• Provide a variety of texts, genres, and graphic organizers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children learn literacy through participating in fun and engaging activities, almost as if by accident. Provide multimodal opportunities for learning.</li> </ul>
Previous Literacy Instructional Practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whole group mini lessons around basic skills lasting about 10 minutes.</li> <li>• Small group and individual work based on reading levels and content need.</li> <li>• Daily 5 offered small group structured activities that remained consistent across the year, and CAFE program managed individual growth in reading through conferencing with teacher and independent work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Short whole group lesson as needed for skill. Small group work based on reading levels and content need.</li> <li>• Learning centers daily with activities provided by teachers to help learn state standards concepts.</li> <li>• Pulled small groups aside to work on specific skills during learning center time.</li> </ul>

## Data Collection

Data were collected in multiple forms: interviews, observations, and documents. Data collection occurred in two phases over a three-month span, separated by the school's winter break. The break served to further refine data collection, analysis, and reflection.

**Semi-structured interviews.** Semi-structured interviews elicited information concerning specific questions around instruction, learning opportunities, and ELA CCSS in the literacy curriculum. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed within 24 hours. I interviewed the school administration to find out how the school's staff was educated about the ELA CCSS, and how staff members chose to address these standards. The teacher interviews provided information concerning teacher understandings of ELA CCSS, explored how they prepared their literacy instruction and their thinking behind instruction, and noted how they reported ELA CCSS influenced their instruction and student learning. The interviews informed the teachers' literacy instruction activity analyses (teacher's activity system triangle in each model).

After observations began, the interview protocol included summarizing and reflecting activities of recent literacy instruction observations. This protocol allowed for both parties to check understandings, ask questions, and comment on the recent activities. While each of the four interviews included similar protocols, the questions and purpose of each interview differed.

**Observations.** Each classroom was observed 9 times for 75 minutes over a 3-month span (11.25 hours each). With two participating teachers, observations followed a rotating AAB/BBA schedule. This observational schedule allowed for six weeks of observations with an equal number of AAB/BBA patterns. The ongoing weekly analysis provided opportunities for coding, memos, and reflection, which helped to inform the next phase of observations.

My focus for observations aligned with the CHAT framework concerning: subject interactions, activities, objects, tools, and negotiation of rules and roles in the classroom community, which form the pattern of literacy activity systems (Kostogriz, 2000). Observational field notes included instructional contexts, teacher to child and child-to-child interactions, and the involvement of materials and texts. With the literacy activity acting as CHAT's unit of analysis, the observational focus was centered on engagement in literacy activities. Observed narratives described participants' verbal interactions, actions, and use of materials during literacy activities. Literacy activities occurred in: a) teacher to whole group, b) teacher to small group, c) teacher to individual child, d) children in small groups or partners, and e) child(ren) with materials.

## Trustworthiness and Credibility

To establish reliability, I documented and reported my rationale for choices made relating to data collection and analysis (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). Each step of the collection and analysis was written in *thick* memos. I created a database to represent types of data, length of data and/or time of data collection in research process, and location of data collection, as recommended by Yin (2009) for reliability. Methods for collection and analysis remained consistent across classrooms.

In preparation for member checking discussions and to establish validity, I provided teachers with a two-page summary of their individual analyses from past observations and interviews. The member check summaries provided teachers an opportunity beyond reflection in interviews to offer feedback, ask questions, and respond to questions. Each participant reported the summaries were accurate, and both felt good to see all the things they had thought and noticed about the implementation of the ELA CCSS on paper.

## Data Analysis

To conduct a CHAT analysis, Yamagata-Lynch (2010) first suggests that a constant comparative analysis is used to identify narratives that best represent what is happening within the data—no new theories are formed. Once categories are developed, appropriately selected narratives individually undergo a CHAT systems analysis (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). The two-step process of the CHAT analysis is described below.

### Constant comparison of interviews and observations

To examine teachers' perceptions and implementation of the ELA CCSS in instruction, I used constant comparative analysis (Charmaz, 2006). Data analysis began with a single interview with the school administrator to aid my understanding of the cultural context of this school and gain more insight on the district's role in CCSS implementation. Teacher observations began the next week. I conducted iterative data collection and analyses from classroom observations and teacher interviews.

Coding occurred in multiple phases: 1) initial line-by-line open coding of actions and language, 2) initial coding based upon emerging themes within the open codes that were reflective of my research questions, 3) selective focused coding helped to organize and synthesize the multiple initial codes into subcategories, and 4) coding to determine categories from sub-category codes (Charmaz, 2006). I describe each phase of analysis.

**Phase one: Open coding.** Memos and open codes were created and compared across contexts and data types. For interviews, I created a note summarizing each turn taken. If multiple topics appeared within a turn, separate notes for each topic. I recorded reflective notes about activities and discussions occurring in interviews and observations to offer support in allowing me to stop to jot down new ideas, provide places for reflection beyond the initial coding, more clearly define the categories, and think about how the codes and later categories differ or relate (Charmaz, 2006).

**Phase two: Initial codes.** Next I created initial codes. When rereading the data, I wrote down words or phrases as I noted recurring topics, language, and actions throughout the data. Once initial codes were established in ATLAS.ti, I recoded all previous data. ATLAS.ti more easily (re)organizes and manipulates data into varying groups to see larger patterns, improving the later creation of selective codes and categories.

**Phase three: Selective coding.** During selective coding, initially coded data were compared for similarities, areas of overlap, and contrasting characteristics, and put into subcategories with the qualitative data analysis software ATLAS.ti using methods recommended by Friese (2012). With ATLAS.ti, all the data with initial codes concerning types of ELA instruction were grouped and renamed by their similarities. For example, an initial code for teacher questioning of text genre questioning was placed under the larger selective code of "common literacy instructional practice for both teachers" (ex. Practice\_genrequestioning). I created several broad headings that served as subcategories that became code families. These family headings included *planning*, *practices*, *activities*, *assessment*, *accommodations*, *ELLs*, *context*, and *teachers' perceptions*. I found that I placed most of the interview data in planning, assessment, context, and teachers' perceptions of ELA, while observational data fell under the categories of activities, practices, or accommodation.

**Phase four: Developing categories.** I compared each subcategory to other subcategories, and codes within a subcategory against other codes in other subcategories. Subcategories that overlapped were combined into one larger category. Subcategories from selective coding that spanned all categories were themes across the data. Figure 2 outlines the final categories with corresponding subcategories.

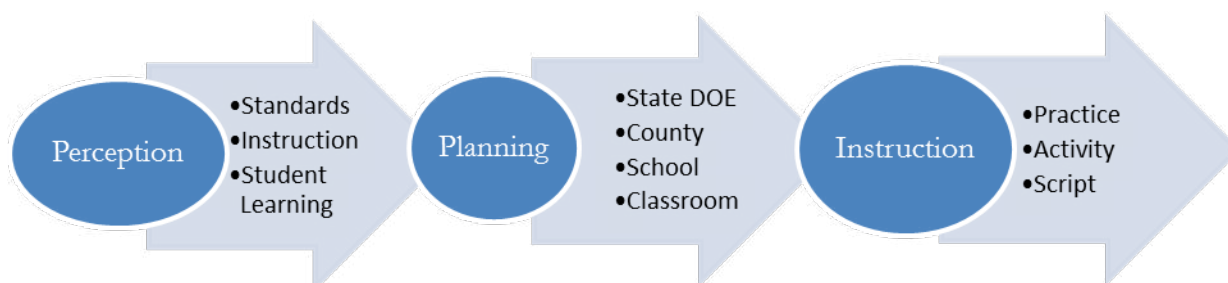


Figure 2. Category diagram.

### CHAT Analysis of Literacy Activities

After organizing the data by categories with subcategories, I understood which literacy instructional activity narratives best represented what is happening within the data to perform activity theory analysis (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). The CHAT analysis occurred in two phases.

**Phase one: Data collection and preliminary CHAT analyses.** During interviews and observations I documented detailed field notes then typed the same day into expanded field notes. Information gathered during interviews with both administration and teachers provided much information for supporting later activity analysis. Information about the district's role in providing professional development, resources, and other supports was included in the individual activity analyses as part of the teacher's activity models. Similarly, interview data concerning teacher beliefs about instruction and learning, described past instructional practices, and perceived changes in instruction and assessment were used to analyze the teacher's activity model. Details for analysis of activity models may be seen in phase two.

Observational notes focused on individual and collective involvement in literacy activities, participant interactions and language, use of artifacts, and verbalized or observed objective(s) and products (Charmaz, 2006; Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). In other words, I focused my observational eye and field notes on literacy activities and tried to include as much description as possible from the beginning of the activity to the end, creating as clear a record of the activity event as possible. I analyzed the data concerning activities from observed instruction by asking questions of the data based on my theoretical CHAT framework (See Table 2).

Table 2  
*CHAT Data Analysis*

Category	Analysis Questions Related to CHAT model
Activities	What activities occur? Do they focus on ELA standards?
Objectives	What is the objective of the activity? What ELA standards may be involved in the objective? What objectives not related to ELA are involved? Cont'd...
Practices	Are there any practices routinely used for ELA planning or instruction?
Contexts	What context frames the activity of discussion (both local and larger political/social)?
Perceptions	What teacher perceptions may inform use of artifacts and creation of roles and rules within activity (taken from interview data that was undergoing constant comparison)
Scaffolding	What scaffolding and mediation were occurring?
Artifacts	How are artifacts used in activities? Concrete or conceptual?
Rules	What are the spoken and unspoken rules of the activity?
Roles	What are the roles of the subjects in the activity and whose script mediates actions and objectives?
Products	What products arise from activity to represent a finished activity objective? How is this product assessed related to ELA standards?
Planning	How does the teacher plan for ELA standard activity? This was connected to data from interviews and helped to explain the teacher's role in the activity which might not be seen through observation and helps place activity within context.
Community	What is the teacher perception of the community? This explains subject's view of the activity, community, and objective that is not revealed in observation.

I then created and defined CHAT based codes (Table 3) for examining the activities within the observational data. I looked for similarities and differences within and across cases concerning activities and interactions within an activity. For activities I recorded in field notes, I also labeled which ELA standard the activity addressed or if an ELA standard was left unidentified. If no ELA standard was noted, I asked the teacher for the corresponding standard. Teachers provided evidence of objectives from the County rubrics, which I photographed as extant texts. These notes provided documentation of which standards were covered most frequently by activities within and across cases.

Table 3  
*Defined CHAT Codes*

Code Labels and Definitions for Activity Systems Components	
ELA activity	An ELA activity was defined as an event in which the children performed a task with the final objective of the task being a product or process related to one or more ELA standard(s).
ELA practice	An ELA practice was defined as a procedure or activity that occurred repeatedly and became a classroom cultural standard of behaving or doing and is related to one or more ELA standard(s). An example of an ELA practice would be asking key questions of the text when reading with a group, a peer, or to self, a practice connected to first grade's ELACC1RL1 and second grade's ELACC2RL1.
Object/objective	I initially coded for only activity objectives that were provided by the teacher. In the later stages of analysis when specific activities were selected, I created a new code for student objectives within the activity. This decision was based on Gutierrez's description of script and counter script in which the children can have an alternate understanding of the objective, or create an entirely new objective for the activity.
Rules	The rules of the activity were coded based on what the teacher stated or implied about her expectations for the children's behavior and action. During focused coding, this included the children's responses to the rules, and rules they created for themselves within the activity.
Roles	I created the roles code to describe in one word the divisions of labor amongst individuals within the activity. The responsibilities that individuals were to carry out within the activity were all coded as roles. These roles, or divisions of labor, underwent analysis specific to activity and individual in the CHAT analysis of selected activities.
Artifacts	To help define and code artifacts, I used Cole's (1996) definition of artifacts: (1) actual objects, (2) modes of actions (e.g. beliefs and traditions), and (3) things that are not directly practical, such as perceptions to examine modes of action. I analyzed how the actions of the teachers and actions of the students helped define the classroom culture and its role as a mediating artifact (Clifford, 1986). I coded artifacts observed during instructional activities as either concrete tools for mediation or conceptual or psychological tools. To help guide my coding scheme for second and third tier artifacts, I focused codes for non-concrete artifacts as including human interactions that make visible modes of actions such as beliefs, traditions, and perceptions (Cole, 1996). Interview data from constant comparison analysis helped inform possible teacher perceptions being implemented during activity and used to mediate instruction, as well as comments about perceptions that were stated directly to me during observations (e.g. "they always follow the model at first" was regarded as the perception that children need models for support).
Context	This code became a term to define the social, political, historical, and cultural context in which the activities occurred. This included events that were described by participants occurring both in and outside the classroom or seen in observations. Cultural contexts involved the stated beliefs and repeatedly demonstrated practices of the teacher, as well as the behaviors of the students, seen across time and activities. Social and political contexts occurred in classroom level, grade level, school level, county level, and state level.
Teacher perceptions	Teacher perceptions of student literacy learning, ELA standards, and ELA instruction

**Phase two: Activity system analysis.** Yamagata-Lynch (2010) suggests using a triangle diagram model to represent the activity system during analysis and for reporting purposes. Each part of the activity system should be labeled within the diagram with narrative descriptions to relate activities and individual parts of diagram to the larger whole of the triangle activity system.

To begin drafting activity systems models one must first identify narratives that represent categories from constant comparison that are seen within the elements of subject, artifact, object, rule, community, and division of labor (role) (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p. 75). Activity systems models rely on thick descriptive narratives, which researchers identify from code and category examination. After a narrative is selected, information from the examination of codes and categories from constant comparison help to create and finalize the activity systems model. The narrative and activity systems model are co-dependent upon each other for CHAT analysis and will be presented together for the reader.

To analyze an activity narrative and construct an activity model I adapted two models suggested by Yamagata-Lynch (2010) for translating activity systems: 1) Mwanza's eight step model (2002, p. 55) and 2) Yamagata-Lynch and Smaldino's activity systems model (2007, p. 60).

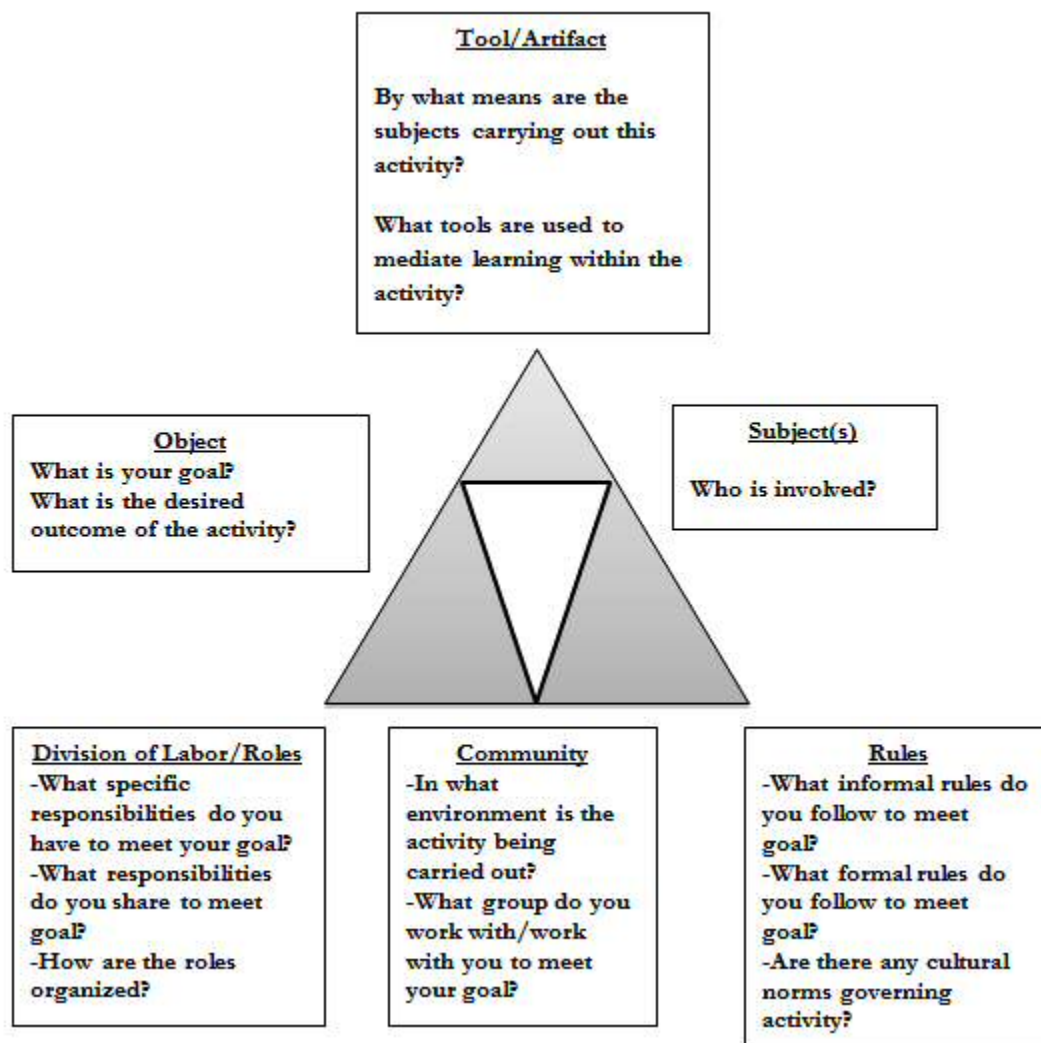


Figure 3. Adapted Activity Systems model

The last step of CHAT analysis involves comparing the narrative to the activity system to look for discrepancies or information that needs further attention. Yamagata-Lynch compares this continual checking between the two as reliving the experience but within the specific framework outlined by the question and activity. Finally, the narratives and activity systems were solidified, and participants were asked to review findings for trustworthiness before reporting.

In reviewing the findings it is important to note that this study did not provide for interviews of students' experiences, the analysis for their participation in the activity was limited to what was observed. In contrast, teacher participation in the activity is augmented by information from teacher interviews, and was therefore the focus of this research.

## Findings

### Context Counts: A Cultural Historical Look at Policy to Practice

The findings section is broken into two parts. The first section of the findings provides a summary of constant comparison analysis findings that allow the reader to develop a richer understanding of the cultural historical influences on teacher instruction and children's literacy learning experiences observed in their literacy activities of the enacted curriculum. The categories below derived from constant comparison findings better informed the activity systems' components of community, rules, roles, and subject. The findings from the constant comparison analysis are described to support the reader in constructing his/her own meaning from CHAT narratives and analyses in the final sections. The second section contains the findings of the CHAT analysis and is the focus piece for the following discussion.

#### Part 1: Influences on ELA CCSS Implementation and Literacy Learning Activities

Factors beyond the actual Common Core standards influenced the teachers' implementation of the ELA CCSS and their literacy instruction. Teacher statements, classroom literacy instruction, and instructional documents revealed that the implementation of the ELA CCSS for the two teachers at this school was influenced by a variety of nested contextual levels. Examples of influences at a variety of levels include: CCSS documents, State DOE guidelines for implementation and assessment, County guidelines and assessments, school-level supports such as the literacy instructional coach, grade level lesson plans, and classroom communities. Local interpretations of the CCSS from the County and other local communities provided important direction for policy implementation (Coburn, 2001). These factors are further expounded upon below.

**Influences from outside the classroom on ELA instruction.** As Coburn (2001) states, formal and informal structures and alliances shape the ways in which policy influences classrooms. In this study, structures of the County, State, and school influenced how the ELA CCSS moved from policy to individual teacher's literacy instruction. Teacher ELA instruction was influenced by the State's adoption of the CCSS and PARCC. Instruction was also influenced by varying degrees by the State's DOE instructional units and resource recommendations. The County influenced how teachers defined the ELA standards, how and when they incorporated them into ELA instruction, what students should be expected to do in relation to the standards, as well as how to assess student mastery of the ELA standards. The school encouraged grade levels to collaborate and form a shared understanding of the standards and standards-based instruction. Together with the school's literacy specialist, the grade levels developed literacy instruction plans. There was a range of uniformity across grade level teams, with second grade standardizing their instruction more than the first grade team.



Last, the implementation of the ELA standards was interpreted and implemented by the individual classroom teacher, incorporating standards to best fit the needs of her class. This was starkly apparent during observations, in which it was noted that the same standards taught within similar structures provided very different literacy learning opportunities.

**Teacher Influence on ELA instruction.** Instructional practices in both classes were strongly grounded in the ELA standards. It was common practice to use the same standard objective in both their reading and their writing instruction as required in the County's unit frameworks. While County ELA CCSS requirements largely influenced teacher instructional practices, these practices differed in the individual teacher's use of activities, instructional scripts and other artifacts, and rules for participation within the activities. The following section presents examples of teacher influence on ELA instruction as viewed through specific literacy activities that accurately portray typical instruction observed in literacy instruction.

## Part 2: Unpacking ELA CCSS Instructional Practices through CHAT

I examined literacy instruction using constant comparison analysis, which revealed three main categories: (1) teacher practices, (2) ELA activities, and (3) instructional scripts. These three categories are interrelated as teacher practices are made up of patterns of ELA activities and instructional scripts, and instructional scripts are patterns of interaction and discourse seen across activities and practices. I characterized these scripts as teacher artifacts in the CHAT analysis. I analyzed narrative samples from each of these three categories using suggested procedures from Yamagata-Lynch's (2010) CHAT analysis. Using Engeström's third generation CHAT framework, I examined the instructional opportunities being offered to students in the literacy curriculum.

The following narratives, CHAT models, and corresponding discussions reveal how ELA CCSS influences teacher instruction and student learning (the two activity systems). Literacy activities reported here are representative samples of the many ELA activities that were most prevalent in the teacher's ELA instructional practices. Each teacher's literacy block contained both whole group and small group instruction. Examples of literacy activities related to common literacy practices in both whole and small group representative of each class are featured below. Preparing for ELA assessment was a theme across all data and is therefore the focal point of the two whole group narrative discussions. The influences of the multiple factors within the CHAT activity systems are discussed and the reader may draw their own conclusions through the narratives and activity system analysis diagram seen in Figure 3 and figures corresponding to each narrative.

**Small group literacy activities.** The following small group narratives exhibit how the two teachers provided literacy instruction based on the same ELA standards and in the same structural format. The commonalities are owed to the County quarterly curricular units and assessment requirements. However, differences in student grouping (community), use of artifacts and resources, and teacher and student rules and roles may be seen across the two classrooms.

In essence, the following two narratives introduce a new book to a small reading group and focusing on the following ELA CCSS as instructional goals (objects):

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.1.5 Explain major differences between books that tell stories and books that give information, drawing on a wide reading of a range of text types.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.1.7 Use illustrations and details in a story to describe its characters, setting, or events.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.2.7 Use information gained from the illustrations and words in a print or digital text to demonstrate understanding of its characters, setting, or plot.

Through CHAT one may see how factors from outside and within the classroom influenced the literacy instruction and learning opportunities provided.

**Ms. Gabe's small group reading activity.** The following activity from the sixth observation is an example of teacher ELA standards-based leveled reading group instruction.

Ms.Gabe (MS. G) presents the book *Animals in Hiding* and asks the group why they think it has that title. The book cover has a picture of a brown frog on wet brown leaves.

Jeeva (JE): They don't wanna die.

Josiah (JO): Maybe when predators come they wanna find a color they can camouflage with.

MS. G: (To Andy and Jeeva, both Dual Language Learners) Do you know what that means, camouflage?

They are silent. She tells them it is about being near a color that is close to their own color and blending in so that other animals can't find them.

MS. G: What kind of book do you think this is, fiction or non-fiction?

Group: Nonfiction.

MS. G: Why do you say that?

Andy (A): It has real pictures

MS. G: Jeeva, what's the difference between fiction and nonfiction besides that it has real photographs and fiction has drawings?

JE: Photographs are true and pictures are make-believe.

MS. G: Andy can you give another reason?

A: These are real nonfiction pictures.

MS. G: (To Andy) Okay. Yes, why might the author be writing this nonfiction?

A: (Silence)

MS. G: Read this page (points to Andy's page). What did you learn? (She asks after he read it aloud.)

A: Animals can camouflage?

MS. G: So why did he write that?

A: To help me learn?

MS. G: To give you information, to learn.

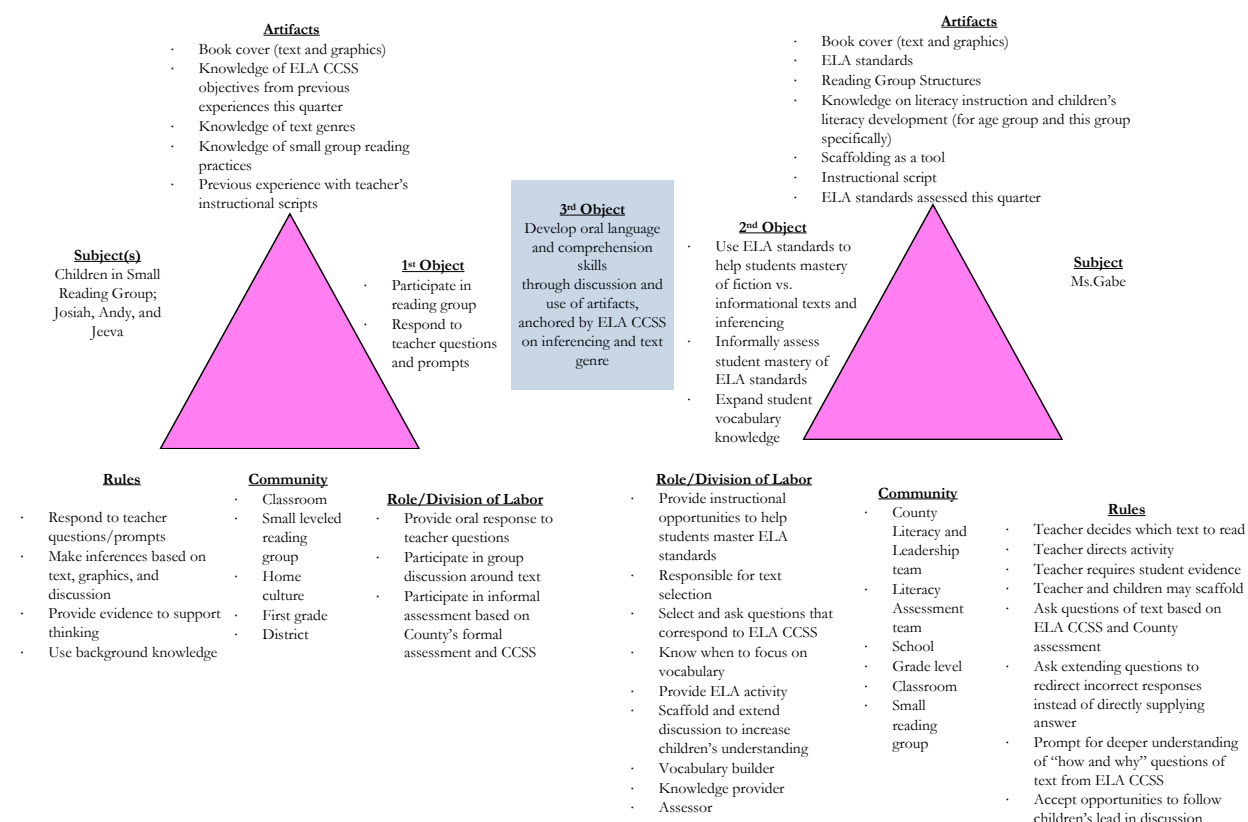


Figure 4. Ms. Gabe's small group CHAT model analysis

The CHAT analysis reveals how Ms. Gabe makes space for her ELA-focused object of predictions and genre inferencing and the children's objective involving making connections to the text. This allows for the creation a third objective—developing a collaboratively mediated understanding of vocabulary and the purposeful use of the title and the author's purpose for writing. While Ms. Gabe provided the directions for the activities, she also allowed opportunities for the children's scripts into her discussion (ex. Ms. Gabe stops to talk about the child's use of the word camouflage). Ms. Gabe provides other opportunities for scaffolding based on children's input by actively using the children's language to redirect their thinking towards the instructional goal of developing skills for identifying genre and author's purpose. Instead of telling the children the difference between fiction and nonfiction and pointing out why the book is nonfiction, Ms. Gabe draws the children's attention to the artifact, or components of the text, and draws on their background knowledge to make the connections.

Ms. Gabe's objects were also influenced by educational and classroom communities. Ms. Gabe's knowledge about the ELA standards is informed by her role on the ELA professional development and assessment teams. This knowledge combined with her understanding of children's literacy development are conceptual tools used to create rules and object(s) for the activity. With an object focus on student mastery of the ELA standards, Ms. Gabe used conceptual artifacts (such as her knowledge of the students' abilities and backgrounds) to drive her use of concrete artifacts in creating interaction between the students, herself, and the text. Her belief that children develop literacy skills best by practicing them with authentic texts influenced how she guided student interaction with the text and activity.

**Ms. McCree's small group reading activity.** The following vignette (observation four) of a second grade reading group provides an example of how this class practiced making inferences.

Ms. McCree (MC): What is the title, Sam?  
 Sam names the title.  
 MC: Who is the author? (Sam raises his hand) Yes, Sam?  
 Sam names the author.  
 MC: The book is published by Yearly. Look at the front of the book, is this fiction or non-fiction?  
 The front of the book has a drawing of two boys standing next to each other in jeans and overalls. The oldest, or larger of the two boys, is giving the smaller one bunny ears. They are smiling.  
 Alicia says it is non-fiction.  
 MC asks Alicia what non-fiction is.  
 Alicia tells her that it means it is real. It is about someone's life.  
 MC: And you think *this* is non-fiction? Are you maybe mixed up?  
 Alicia: No, I think it is about the lives of these boys.  
 MC: (*In a tone that may imply that she does not agree*) Okay ...so you think this is a true story about these two people?  
 Bryce: I think it is a fiction because it is a made up story about these two boys.  
 MC asks the group to make a prediction about what the book will be about based on the cover.

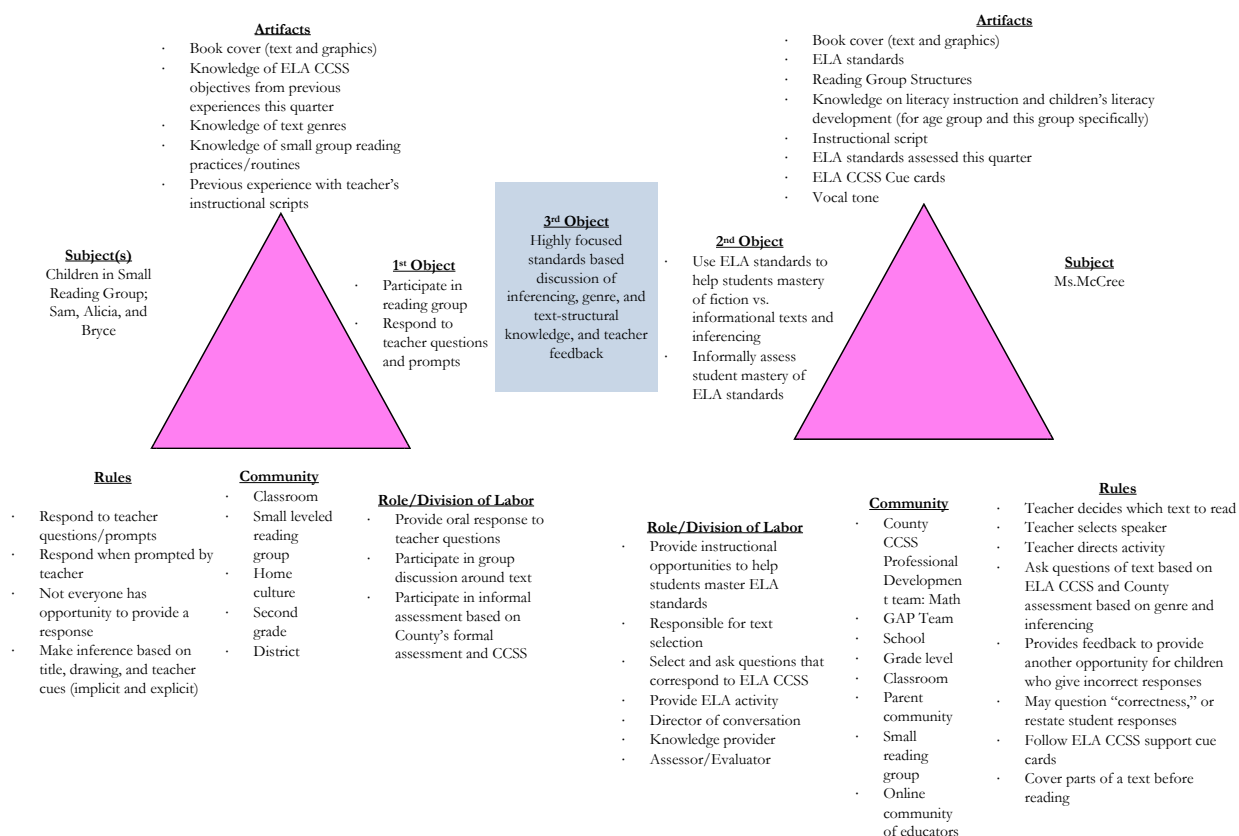


Figure 5. Ms. McCree's small group CHAT model analysis

Ms. McCree's activity objects are also influenced by the rules and responsibilities within the communities she belonged—GAP curriculum assessment team and a grade level team that prepares students for next year's formal accountability testing. Belonging to these communities influenced her

perceived role within the instructional activity. Ms. McCree draws heavily on the artifacts concerning the ELA CCSS used in the County's quarterly plans and assessments to guide her literacy instruction. She keeps a set of ELA CCSS question cards from the literacy support specialist on hand to help her remember what questions to ask students in small groups.

Due to her ELA skill-focused object, Ms. McCree's activity contains rules for students that limit conversations within the bounds of questions and correct answers. Ms. McCree often restates, does not reply to, or corrects student responses she views as incorrect, implying that her role is to direct students practice of ELA skills while she informally assesses student understanding and mastery. The roles and rules provided by the teacher are accepted by the children, thus limiting the group's combined third objective(s) to namely reflect the initial teacher object(s).

**Whole group ELA assessment activities.** Each class participated in daily whole group literacy instruction. Additionally ELA based assessments played an important and time-consuming role in both teachers' literacy instruction. Half of the observations in each classroom involved some type of formal assessment or assessment prep, and frequently occurred in whole group settings. The following practice assessment activities demonstrate the different ways each teacher presented literacy assessments to her students. The rules each teacher provides for student success on the assessment are seen within each teacher's instructional script. The roles the teacher and students carry out differ notably. How the children and teachers use assessment artifacts and conceptual artifacts influenced the mirrored goal of each teacher—help students to be successful in the upcoming County literacy assessment.

**Ms. Gabe's practice assessment activity.** In Ms. Gabe's activity the students and teacher review the previous day's practice assessment that directly mimicked the upcoming quarterly exam. Having scored the practice exam, Ms. Gabe knew which skills were or were not mastered and created the opportunity to address the widely-missed questions based on specific ELA standards in a whole class mini-lesson. For skills more specific to individuals, she then breaks the students into differentiated instructional small groups to further review the test. The following activity is extracted from expanded observation five field notes.

Ms. Gabe has the entire class sitting on the carpet up front with the ELA County practice test, which she helped to design on the literacy assessment team, on the overhead projector. The teacher focuses on a question about the setting. She tells them about choosing the BEST answer. She rereads the passage. Then she asks the students to describe the setting in a sentence. She asks them to close their eyes and think back about the story and how the setting was described. When they open their eyes she has them share with their partners. Then she asks for details.

Nina: Because Pablo was messy his room is messy and because Nico was neat his room is neat.

MS. G: But in this story they are sharing one room. What does this room look like?

Allie: If Pablo would have picked up his stuff, Nico wouldn't have been stepping on it.

MS. G: Oh so Pablo had toys all over the floor on his side of the room? Wow I can really picture that (writes that down on the board). And on the other side, what did it look like?

Prakash: Nico was always organized.

MS. G: Oh! So Nico kept his side organized? That's an adjective I can use. The other side was always neat and organized (writes that on the board).

She dismisses the children into three groups. One group will work with the instructional assistant on correcting test questions, another group will do the same with Ms. Gabe, and a larger third group will start the Daily 5.

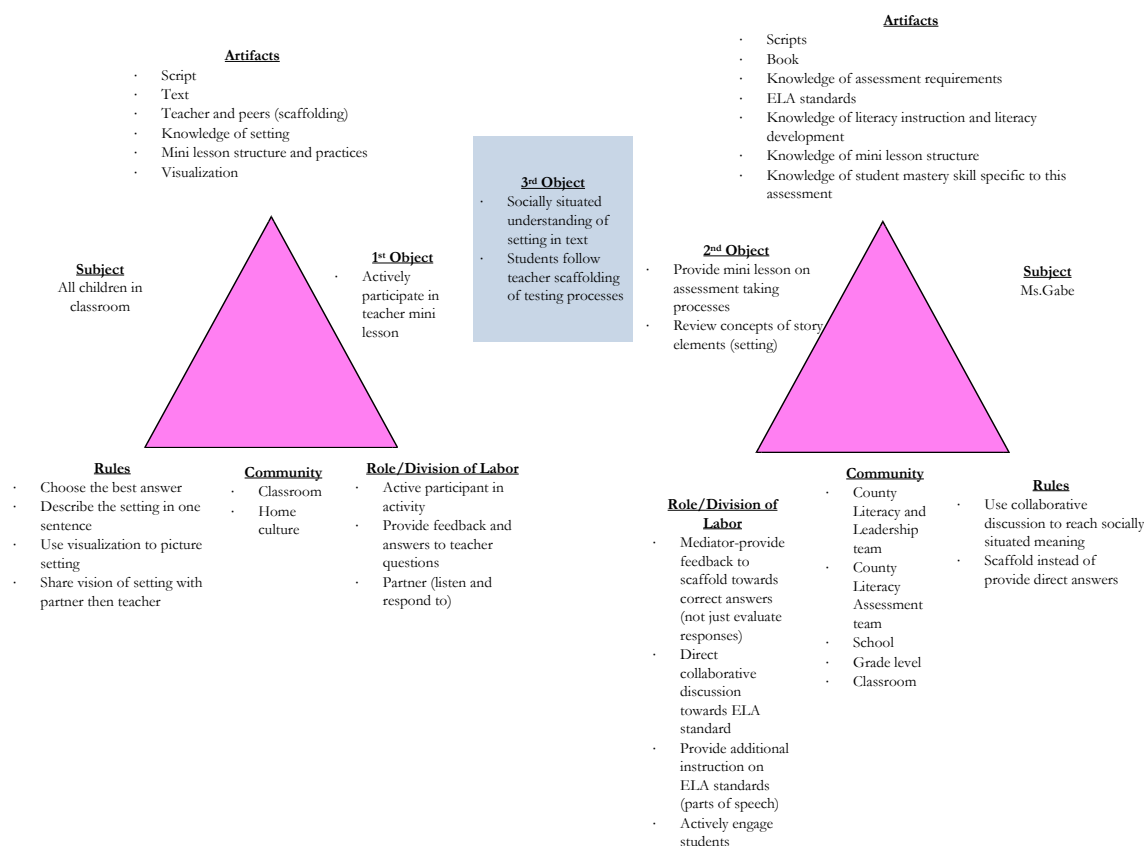


Figure 6. Ms. Gabe's assessment-based mini-lesson activity model

Ms. Gabe's activity object was twofold in that she wished to improve both the students' test taking processes as well as their understanding of story elements most commonly missed in the assessments. The assessment is an artifact that manipulates children's rules of engagement, and supports the teacher's objective as a form of evaluation of skill mastery. The communities to which the teacher belonged were very important to this activity, as Ms. Gabe was a member of the County's literacy assessment team which made this assessment. Her responsibilities within the communities and individual classroom reinforce the commitment to her activity objectives. As seen in Ms. Gabe's previous example, she built on student responses to work towards her specific skills-based objective, indicating her role is facilitative in nature. The rules and roles of her students are influenced by the mediation she provided with her known artifacts (e.g., knowledge of test and knowledge of student literacy development), and the use of these mediated artifacts was influenced by how students followed rules and performed their roles within the activity.

**Ms. McCree's practice assessment activity.** In Ms. McCree's activity the students and teacher are completing a practice assessment together. This differs from Ms. Gabe's class which took the exam separately and reviewed together. Ms. McCree's role includes explaining the rules and directions of the assessment as well as providing rules for how students should complete the assessment (ex. providing tips and prompts for answering as the children work). The following activity was extracted from expanded observation nine field notes.

Ms. McCree is giving a practice test in preparation for the County's ELA quarterly assessment. The grade level found this test on readworks.org and believed it to be an excellent match in format to previous quarterly assessments. Ms. McCree reads and interprets the directions to the entire class, with the exception of her ESOL student who is at a computer. The first two boxes are for them to write the author's purpose for each of the two passages.

Before the children have time to think about and write the author's purpose in the first box, she asks a question.

MC: Do you think in the first one, it may be to write it in a rhyme way? A first person way? A more fun way? They are similar but there are differences. Be sure to make that clear in the author's purpose.

The children write an author's purpose in the story boxes. Some of the children have copied her. For example, Larry's first box reads, "tell about pandas in a fun way" and in the second box, "Tell about pandas in a real way."

Others have not copied her and have not connected with her idea. Laurel's first box reads, "If someone found a panda and took care of it, they'd know what to do."

MC asks the children if they are finished with number one. Most don't answer and some nod, though more than half the class has not completed it and are still writing. MC moves on to number two and says they can go back if they are not finished with the first one.

MC asks the class what it means to only be in one of the texts.

Mary Anne: It would only be in that story and it wouldn't be in the other one.

MC: How could you figure that out?

Naiyla: Read the topic sentences?

Allison: Reread them to see what the second one is missing.

MC: Yes, you could even skim it. What does that mean?

Bryce: Run your pencil over the stories.

MC: Not quite it. Let's practice.

Kerra: Wait! I have one.

Before the class has had a chance to look over the stories again, Kerra shares a sentence from the poem about the panda having red brown fur in the morning (information not stated in the second story).

MC: Let's check the other story. Is it there? (four seconds) No. Well it wants it exactly, so write those words specifically. You have *got got got* (hops up and down), if it says show evidence, you have got to write it *exactly*. What it says in the text. We had problems with that on the last test. You can't make some of it up.

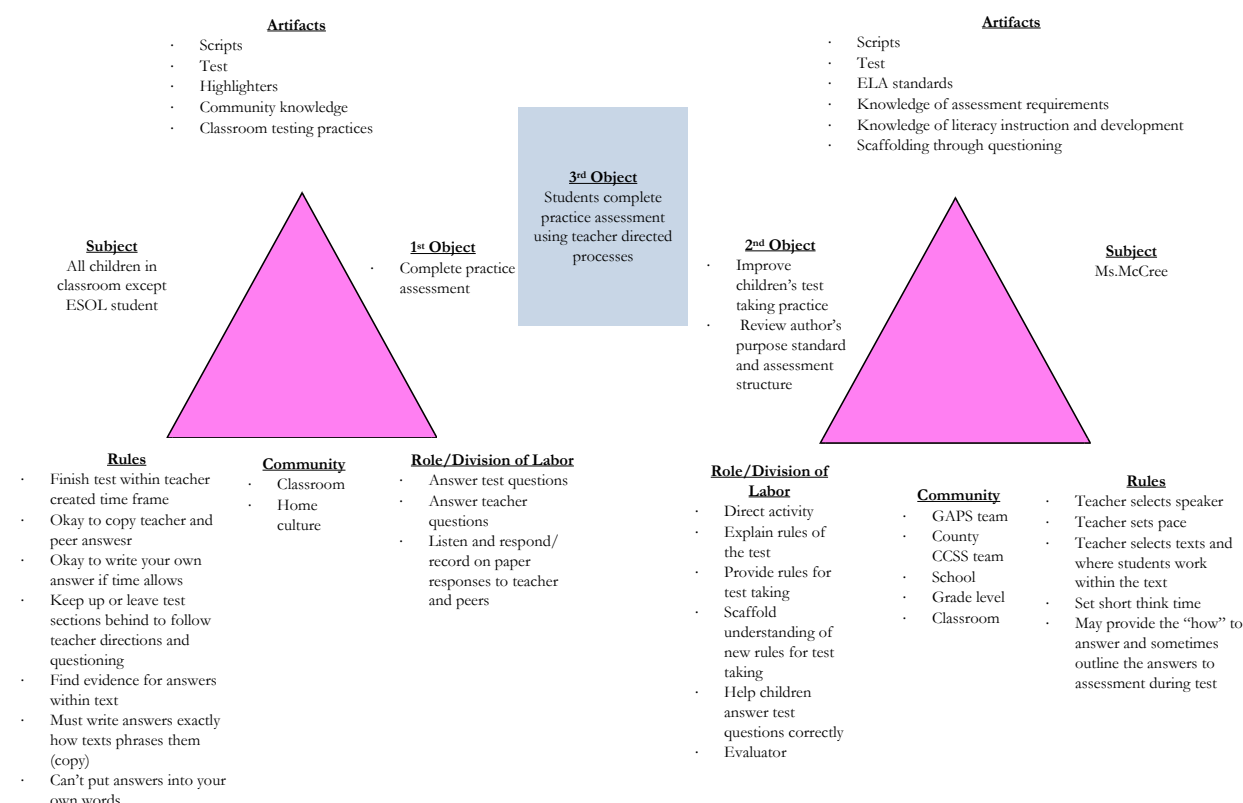


Figure 7. Ms. McCree's whole group practice assessment activity model

The object for this activity is grounded in improving student assessment processes and outcomes. The larger and local CCSS standards-based communities influenced this activity's objective, rules, and roles. How the teacher interpreted the community's values and expectations for successful implementation and student success with ELA standards, and how she perceived her contributing role within the community, influenced the rules and roles she created for the activity. The teacher's perception of her role as director and evaluator influenced her additional role in scaffolding the children's understanding of the rules of test taking. Conversations with Ms. McCree informed that she saw it as her role to teach the children "how to answer" the questions, directly up to the point of giving the answer but not providing the answer precisely. The children relied on the teacher and her knowledge to mediate the activity, but not all students followed this script. Some students presented a counter script to her directions by writing responses that were not taken directly from the text, thus breaking the teacher's rule that answers must be evidenced from text.

## Discussion

While each teacher covered the same core ELA standards within an almost identical district curriculum with similar student populations, the instructional and learning outcomes found in their literacy activities differed greatly. While the CCSS controlled all literacy activity objectives and assessment activities across classrooms, the CCSS did not influence *how* standards were implemented and mastered. The instructional methods that lead to different student learning opportunities are discussed below through the components of the CHAT framework.

## Objects



The most notable characteristic of all activity objects was the need to master ELA standards. Yet the path to standards-driven objects was influenced by the individual teacher. Final activity object outcomes in Ms. Gabe's class reflected a collaborative goal that included student objects. In Ms. McCree's class final learning objects remained rigidly similar to her initial ELA standard object before beginning the activity. Student objects and scripts were often denied or ignored in order to focus on CCSS objective. How these two teachers assigned student roles, created rules (sometimes in response to student scripts and counter script), and used of artifacts altered activity learning outcomes.

### **Rules and Roles/Division of Labor**

While rules and roles in each class remained directed towards reaching CCSS objectives, they differed notably by teacher. Ms. Gabe's rules allowed for student interaction and peer scaffolding. This created flexible roles for both the teacher and students. Ms. Gabe might take on a directive role while the children listened and responded, or she might flip the roles by listening and responding to students in a way that connected their responses to the ELA objective. Ms. McCree's rules and roles were static in comparison. Ms. McCree did not allow for interaction beyond students responding to questions asked by the teacher. Her students were not asked to work collaboratively to achieve goals, with the exception of one activity that involved students helping each other find and copy a sentence from a book in the teacher's absence. An unspoken rule noted across all Ms. McCree's observations was that the children never addressed each other directly, but always commented straight to Ms. McCree. The role of students in Ms. McCree's class was to receive teacher knowledge and evaluation, a notable contrast to the student roles in Ms. Gabe's class where students were given the opportunity to be active learners and meaning makers.

### **Community**

Both the classroom community and larger communities of grade level, school, and district may be noted as possible influences on ELA instruction. Classroom communities and community dynamics differed in part to the rules and roles of the communities created by the teacher and accepted by the students. Ms. Gabe scaffolded learning in her first grade community as students worked collaboratively or individually towards the ELA objective. In Ms. McCree's classroom the community worked almost entirely as individuals under the direction of the teacher. The second grade community was larger in size and was also subject to district standards-based assessments beyond that of the other primary grades. Ms. McCree's perception of these factors may have influenced the way in which she directed her classroom community.

Also, each teacher was part of different educational communities. At the grade level, Ms. Gabe's first grade team showed flexibility in lesson planning together as a group but then differentiated as needed. Ms. Gabe exuded confidence as a leader of her team and knowing what was best for her students. Meanwhile Ms. McCree's second grade team split up the content areas, each teacher taking an area to plan. Ms. McCree said she made some adjustments to these plans based on previous teaching and student need, but felt uncomfortable going too far from the group's plans.

Teacher communities also differed at the school and district levels. Ms. Gabe's membership to the literacy and literacy assessment teams at the school and district level provided different understandings of the ELA CCSS and their assessments. Ms. McCree was a member of the Math and curriculum evaluation team, which may have influenced her level of knowledge about ELA CCSS and willingness to follow curricular artifacts more closely. Ms. McCree noted that she felt pressured by the school and the district to follow the standards. She also expressed feeling pressure to prepare second graders for accountability testing, a concept not mentioned by the former fourth

grade teacher, Ms. Gabe. During the study, Ms. McCree discovered the district was to give all second graders a surprise CCSS assessment as a measure of how well “the CCSS implementation was going.” This was a topic of much discussion during interviews. The pressures of accountability assessment were notably a stress for Ms. McCree, a former Kindergarten teacher.

### **Artifacts**

Teachers naturally use their own cultural and content knowledge about literacy instruction and literacy development (Clifford, 1986). The teachers used these conceptual artifacts to guide student learning within the activity. Teachers’ beliefs and perceptions played a role in how they constructed the rules, roles, and objects of an activity.

The use of the artifacts in each classroom was similar when artifacts were concrete, but differed when conceptual. Ms. Gabe’s instructional activities were influenced by her belief that children should have personal experiences discussing and working with texts, and involved students actively using authentic texts for standards-based objectives. While Ms. McCree believed that children needed to have fun with literacy practices, her use of artifacts reflected her concerns about being held accountable on State and district assessments. Ms. McCree’s activities were designed to be creative and fun, but were strictly aligned teacher scripts, objectives, rules, and requirements.

Conceptual norms for practice included the use of teacher scripts. Ms. Gabe created instructional scripts that allowed room for student scripts. Ms. McCree’s instruction imposed the teacher script upon the activity, ignoring or denying student attempts at counterscripts. Inclusion or exclusion of student scripts influenced the roles students undertook and student opportunities for learning the appointed ELA standard.

## **Conclusion**

This study’s CHAT analysis of literacy activities within and across two primary grade classrooms implementing the ELA CCSS, exemplifies the variation in how policy becomes practice as teachers and students create an enacted literacy curriculum influenced by: a) artifact use; b) rules and roles of community members, c) communities to which they belong, and d) participant objects.

### **From Policy to Practice: Implications of ELA CCSS Implementation**

When policy makers create new educational policies to improve teacher accountability and student achievement, the myriad of cultural, societal, and historical influences on said policies are unknown. The success of policy enactment and student achievement does not rest solely on the classroom teacher, as the implementation of educational policy is also influenced by stakeholders at the state, district, community, school, and grade levels (Fisher, 2011). Despite attempts to standardize learning through a common set of curriculum standards, individual instructional practices seen in this study provided notably different learning opportunities for children.

### **Instructional Opportunities in the Enacted Literacy Curriculum**

Instructional activities and teacher instructional scripts from each classroom were framed by the ELA CCSS, furthering Black’s (2007) finding that teachers’ classroom instructional cultures are influenced by outside political factors. In all lessons, the two teachers demonstrated ELA standard objectives and behaviors, and provided literacy instruction that consistently supported the ELA CCSS and County requirements.

Findings from this study reveal the depth in which the CCSS has influenced day- to-day literacy instruction. Literacy instruction, within the realms of these two classrooms, was

dominated by ELA standards, skills, and assessments, in some instances to the point in which children would be silenced to return to the ELA objective. Both teachers voiced the concern that the ELA CCSS had turned their instruction into scripts for ELA skill mastery. Yet despite their perceived loss of their own teacher autonomy due to the standardization of the curriculum, literacy instruction in each classroom reflected the individuality of each teacher. In line with prior research (Edwards, 2010; Pacheco, 2010), results from this study indicate that even with a similar, and in this case nearly identical, curriculum teachers offer students differing types of instructional opportunities based on their own beliefs and perceptions (Powell, 1996). This indicates the need for additional studies that examine teachers' perceptions of their own power to interpret educational policy and implement mandated standards based on their beliefs about literacy instruction and children's literacy development (Thomas, 2013).

### **CHAT and Curriculum Reform**

Using CHAT to study curriculum reform is unique in that CHAT acts as a theoretical and analytical lens that allows for the examination of policy implementation at multiple levels simultaneously. By examining the influence of educational policy on literacy instruction through CHAT, one may see the influence of districts, schools, teachers, and students on the enactment of educational policy (Fullan, 2010). Globally, competition for high test scores and employment rates drive educational policies to focus teacher and student accountability, which in turn drives teacher instruction to focus on assessments and assessment-taking skills (Dooley & Assaf, 2009). Teachers feel the pressures of accountability and standards-based instructional mandates even in the primary grades, a pressure which ironically changes the opportunities provided to students to learn literacies needed in today's global climate. This leaves teachers attempting to balance meeting student needs with survival within the system for both themselves and their students.

### **Significance**

This study adds to the small body of literature concerning policy's influence at the ground level of education by using Engestrom's Third Generation CHAT model to examine the multiple personal and societal factors that influence teacher implementation of educational policy at the actual level of teacher instruction and student learning (Coburn, 2001). Additionally, the study contributes to the paucity of cultural-historically framed research concerning the influence of educational policy on literacy learning opportunities in the enacted curriculum. CHAT provides the ecological validity in which researchers may more accurately examine policy's influence on literacy instruction and student learning while maintaining the integrity of the real-life situations within social and cultural contexts. This study maintains that cultural historical factors will influence even a standardized curriculum, further questioning a standards-based accountability reform model as an effective method for promoting equitable college and career readiness and decreasing the student achievement gap (Apple, 2003; Mattaei, 2012).

### **Limitations**

While this study's use of CHAT highlights contextual influences on policy, there are limitations to consider. The study took place in consecutive primary grades in the same district at the same school. This allowed for a more thorough description of the cultural historical context for studying ELA CCSS implementation. The context of the study was also beneficial for understanding the differences in curricular enactment at the individual classroom level with teachers and students as agents of influence. More field studies of ELA

CCSS instruction are needed in a variety of contexts, including classrooms in a range of grade levels, schools, districts, states, and cultural communities. This study is a limited portrayal of ELA CCSS implementation at the ground level. Yet findings from this study begin to paint a picture of how Common Core standards and assessment adoption has vastly influenced teachers' literacy instructional practices. As stated by Ms. McCree, the effects of the adoption of the CCSS in 46 states on teacher practices and student learning remain to be seen.

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