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Overcoming the Impact of Poverty on Learning

Planning Curriculum to Meet the Common Core State Standards

by Dorothy S. Strickland

Adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) has served as a catalyst for curriculum reform. Effective curriculum planning will likely depend on how well those involved understand what the standards are, what they are not, and how that knowledge best informs instruction.

Simply put, the CCSS *for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* provide a shared and consistent vision of what students should know and be able to do. They provide guidance for educators and for those who shape the policy to support educational infrastructures.

The standards do not define how teachers should teach, the entire spectrum of instructional content, the nature of advanced work beyond the core, the interventions needed for students who may need them, and the full range of support for English language learners and students with special needs (CCSS, p. 6). An effective curriculum will delineate these areas. Together, standards and curriculum provide a process that includes a shared vision of expectations with multiple pathways for attaining them.

The curriculum framework offered here is a model for planning and implementation that can be adapted to K-12 in self-contained or departmental settings. Curriculum planners will find it helpful to begin by reviewing the key design considerations, stated in the Standards and their implications (CCSS, p. 4). These include:

(1) **An integrated model of literacy.** The language arts—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—should be integrated with each other and across the curriculum. Students are asked to read and/or listen to texts read aloud and respond critically through discussion and in writing. Response may take the form of written or oral explanation and argument. Emphasis is placed on critical thinking, problem solving, and collaboration with peers.

(2) **A cumulative model of expectations.** Instruction should address grade specific standards in tandem with the broader goals of college and career readiness. Sometimes referred to as *spiraling,* similar standards are expressed with increasing complexity from grade to grade, providing an ongoing and cumulative progression of mastery that is refined and applied at increasingly higher levels for various purposes and in a variety of contexts.

(3) **Shared responsibility for students' literacy development.** Teachers in self-contained classrooms are generally responsible for the integration of curriculum. However, grade level planning among groups of teachers could facilitate the process. In departmental settings, content area teachers and language arts/literacy teachers should plan and work together, thus providing a more coherent program to support students' ability to apply what they learn about language and literacy to actual content under study.

(4) **Research and media skills blended into the standards as a whole**. Critical thinking with texts in all forms of media and technology is emphasized. Texts may be oral or written and make use of a variety of types of media and graphics. Forms may be combined for a specific goal or purpose. An equal balance of literary and informational texts is desirable.

(5) **Greater use of on-grade-level texts.** Emphasis is placed on helping students become proficient in reading complex texts independently and in a variety of content areas. Models of instruction should include complex texts for reading aloud to students; for closely guided/interactive instruction to build background knowledge, vocabulary, and concepts; and to model how good readers approach difficult texts. Texts representing a range of complexity should also be available for independent reading and response.

The Planning Framework

Initial Planning

1. Select a theme or topic of inquiry based on the local standards for your grade-level in the target content area (e.g. science, social studies). Focus on key content goals relevant to what students are expected to learn or know at the end of this inquiry (ex. State Standards for Social Studies: Grade 4: learning about our state).

2. Select key language arts/literacy goals/expectations based on Common Core State Standards.

3. Select and gather texts to be used. Include various levels of text complexity and media along with other resources.
4. Plan ahead for major activities, such as science experiments, field trips (actual and virtual), and guest speakers.

Getting Started
1. Introduce topic in a creative and engaging ways—displays, field trips (actual or virtual), share selected books and other media. Use these to promote interest, guide discussion, activate background knowledge, and encourage hypotheses about what will be learned.
2. Collaborate with students to develop a list of questions for investigation. Treat it as an ongoing, active list to be revisited and adjusted throughout the inquiry.

Strategies for Teaching and Learning

Ways to Answer Our Questions *Determine and access possible sources to investigate questions and hypotheses posed.*	Ways to Record and Assess What We Learn *Collect and record relevant information. Compare/ contrast sources. Evaluate evidence. Summarize; synthesize.*	Ways to Share/ Report What We Learn *Prepare/ present written/ oral reports, demonstrations, and combinations of these.*
Link to CCSS *Ex. Grade 5. Reading -Draw on information from multiple print or digital sources, demonstrating the ability to locate an answer to a question quickly or to solve a problem efficiently.*	Link to CCSS *Ex. Grade 5. Reading -Determine two or more main ideas of a text and explain how they are supported by key details; summarize the text.*	Link to CSSS *Ex. Grade 5. Writing-Write informative/ explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.*

Some Key Considerations

Curriculum Planning as Professional Learning and Collaboration. Throughout the planning process, teachers, administrators, and others responsible for curriculum should be involved. In an era of increased attention to educator evaluation, it is important that all involved share the same information and expectations.

Key Instructional Strategies that Support Teaching and Learning Differentiated Instruction. Classroom organization should provide for various aspects of differentiated instruction to accommodate diverse needs. For example: teacher/pupil ratio (whole group, small group, one-to-one) and group constituency (extra or specialized support, advanced level work, focused interests, etc.).

Scaffolded Instruction. Provide guided support for student learning. For example, targeted forms of writing should include teacher modeling and teacher/whole group collaboration before individuals are asked to write independently. Modeling the processes involved in reading complex texts—such as previewing, summarizing, and applying various word recognition strategies for addressing difficult vocabulary and concepts—will help reluctant readers attempt more complex texts, especially when many of these concepts have already been introduced through whole group exposure and discussion.

Use of Technology. The selection and use of technology for whole group, small group, and independent activities should be integrated throughout.

Linking Standards, Instruction, and Assessment
Embed periodic formative assessments throughout. Link to the key CCSS addressed. Make use of assessment constructs currently employed by your state and eventually those that are used by the assessment consortium of which your state is a member, either the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) or The SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SMARTER). (See www.achieve.org/PARCC or www.k12.wa.us/SMARTER.)

In this way, students will benefit from meaningful assessment of their learning relative to the key standards addressed in this inquiry and, at the same time, engage in meaningful preparation for the types of items they will encounter in the future. Track student progress in terms of: (1) the child in relationship to him/herself, (2) the child in relationship to the group; (3) the areas of need/competence across the group as a whole. The first two serve to inform differentiated instruction decisions for individuals and small groups. The third helps to inform needed adjustments to the curriculum.

Reference
1. Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010). *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects.* Washington, DC: CCSSO & National Governors Association.

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