EARLY IMPLEMENTERS OF THE COMMON CORE: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF THREE CALIFORNIA PRINCIPALS

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SIGNATURE PAGE

DISSERTATION: EARLY IMPLEMENTERS OF THE COMMON CORE: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF THREE CALIFORNIA PRINCIPALS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine how principals who were early implementers of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) engaged in sensemaking (Weick, 2009) in order to facilitate the improvement of instructional practices needed to effectively implement the CCSS. The researcher investigated how principals who were early implementers made sense of the standards when determining their leadership decisions. In addition, the researcher sought to find out why principals made the leadership decisions they did when attempting to facilitate change in teacher practices to meet the demands of the CCSS.

Using both the narrative analysis and the paradigmatic analysis of narratives methodologies (Polkinghorne, 1995), this study added insight into the journeys of three California principals who were early implementers of the CCSS. Data were collected through semistructured interviews conducted with each of the three principals. To strengthen the study, the researcher also reviewed her field notes and examined the artifacts provided by the participants. Through the narratives and the analysis of the narratives, common themes emerged. The stories and the accompanying analysis elucidated the importance of how the principals in the study took action at their sites, communicated with teachers, and forged collaborative partnerships with teachers in order to pave the way for full CCSS implementation.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Public interest in principal leadership and effective schools can be traced back to the early 19th century (Dewey, 1938). Speculation about the impact of the principal’s leadership on the quality of the school has continued since Dewey’s critical influence on education in the late 1930s. Over 35 years ago, Edmonds (1979) investigated effective schools and unequivocally concluded that effective schools “have strong administrative leadership without which the disparate elements of good schooling can neither be brought together nor kept together” (p. 32). The findings of Edmunds regarding the importance of the principal sparked interest on a national level and remain unabated today.

Following the release of the report A Nation at Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), a new era of modern research emerged that brought the issue of school quality and principal leadership to a higher level of public awareness. A common thread from prior and current research indicates that the principal’s leadership does indeed make a difference in the overall effectiveness of the school (Cuban, 1998; Ervay, 2006; Hallinger, 1992; Lambert, 2005; Leithwood & Wahlstrom, 2008; ten Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens, & Sleegers, 2012). Prompted by the increased national focus on school quality and principal leadership, other influential thinkers emerged whose pivotal research still remains foundational in today’s educational context. During the 1990s, Hallinger (1992) addressed the problem principals faced when initiating instructional improvement amidst the often-ambiguous goals created by education reform efforts. Cuban (1998) asserted that “regardless of background, all children can learn; the school site, rather than the classroom, is the unit of reform; administrative leadership is essential for improvement” (p. 468).
The leadership of the school principal is fundamental in that principals are required to fill a multitude of roles. Within the professional literature, principals have been noted to hold the responsibility for positively influencing student achievement while also attending to a plethora of daily responsibilities, interruptions, stresses, and emotionally draining activities required to effectively manage their schools (Brown, 2006; Goodwin, Childress, & Cunningham, 2003). As stated by O’Donnell and White (2005), the primary responsibility of the principal “is to facilitate effective teaching and learning with the overall mission of enhancing student achievement” (p. 56). Principals are also expected to build the capacity of school sites in order to lead learning (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013).

In a review of research funded by the Wallace Foundation, principals were described as “being in the hot seat” (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005, p. 3) due to increased demands among policy makers and the general public to strengthen teaching and learning for students. Reiterating this sentiment, the numerous responsibilities held by principals were summarized by Davis et al. (2005):

They need to be educational visionaries, instructional and curriculum leaders, assessment experts, disciplinarians, community builders, public relations experts, budget analysts, facility managers, special programs administrators, and expert overseers of legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives. They are expected to broker the often-conflicting interests of parents, teachers, students, district office officials, unions, state and federal agencies, and they need to be sensitive to the widening range of student needs. (p. 3)
As previously noted, research has established that school principals hold critical leadership positions within the school setting in regard to student achievement. Gentilucci and Muto (2007) found statistical correlations spanning 3 decades of research that demonstrated a relationship between student achievement and principal leadership. For years, the Wallace Foundation has been influential in examining principal leadership and influence on effective schools. In one pivotal study funded by the Wallace Foundation, Wahlstrom, Seashore Louis, Leithwood, and Anderson (2010) determined that principal leadership was an important factor in creating conditions that led to increased student achievement. Likewise, Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) determined that the principal’s impact on student learning was second in importance only to classroom instruction. Mendels (2012) identified five critical practices of successful principals that form the construct for the importance of principal leadership in schools. These five practices included cultivating a vision based on high standards for the academic success of every student, developing a cooperative and supportive climate conducive to education, fostering shared leadership with faculty so all stakeholders own the vision of the school, maintaining a focus on instructional improvement, and managing the personnel, process and data in order to increase improvement (Mendels, 2012). Finally, Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) estimated that principals account for approximately 25% of the variation in student achievement among all school-related factors, including teachers and instruction.

An increased interest in examining the principal’s influence on student achievement was further prompted by a convergence of political pressures and educational inquiries regarding widespread concerns over the alleged underachievement
of American public school students (Lynch, 2012; Silva, White, & Yoshida, 2011). With the emergence of “high-stakes testing” initiated by state and federal policy makers in the 1990s, and exemplified by No Child Left Behind, principals were placed in the spotlight as important mediators within the context of increased accountability (Lynch, 2012). As a result, numerous foundations, political organizations, and think-tank sectors began pouring fiscal resources into funding research and regulatory structures designed to foster more effective schools and principal leadership (Barton, 2009).

Driven by the need to improve student achievement for at-risk subgroups and increase accountability for schools, Congress established the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 as a new and more rigorous nationwide system of accountability for schools than most state-adopted accountability systems (Choi, Seltzer, Herman, & Yamashiro, 2007; Heinecke, Curry-Corcoran, & Moon, 2003). Implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) placed new demands on all educators, including school principals, to find ways to improve academic proficiency in math and English-language arts (ELA) for all students and to close persistent achievement gaps between various student subgroups in these areas (Ervary, 2006). In addition, NCLB included a growth model (i.e., Adequate Yearly Progress) that measured an increase in the number of students who scored proficient and advanced on state-approved achievement tests from year to year (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

As a result of NCLB, principals were required to ensure that students at their sites demonstrated yearly achievement gains on standardized tests (Goodwin et al., 2003; Lynch, 2012). Principals at schools that failed to make expected improvement based on test scores risked being replaced (Kress, Zechmann, & Schmitten, 2011). Therefore, an
emphasis was placed on ensuring that instruction was aligned to content that would be assessed by the standardized tests (Cuban, 2012; S. A. Faulkner & Cook, 2006).

Due to the variation of standards across states, along with accusations that NCLB prompted states to “dumb down” standards so states could increase their proficiency rates, there was a call for national standards and tests by politicians, think-tank scholars, civil rights groups, and business communities (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). According to Hipsher (2014), it became necessary to create national standards designed “to improve students’ success nationally and America’s competitive edge globally” (p. 13). Emerging from a central policy feature of the American political system, the accountability movement forms the underlying rationale for why the United States still remains fixated on the need for standards, albeit national standards (Kern, 2011).

Although the development of curriculum standards by states began over 20 years ago, such standards were independently constructed and contained significant variations in content and proficiency criteria (Barton, 2009). However, a growing interest in common standards across the states led to the development of a controversial new set of national standards called the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). Released in 2009, the CCSS have been adopted by 43 states, four territories, the District of Columbia and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA; Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.a). These standards are aimed at developing student learners who possess 21st-century skills, are adaptable, are able to adjust to various situations, and are capable critical thinkers and problem solvers (Uecker, Kelly, & Napierala, 2014).
However, as of May 7, 2015, California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson changed the terminology for the CCSS in California. In a letter to district and county superintendents, Torlakson (2015) stated that he was no longer using the term “Common Core.” Instead, the term “California Standards” would be used. According to Torlakson, this change in terminology was made in order to include all subject areas, to specify that the standards had been approved by California educators, and to indicate that the standards had been upgraded to a higher level of rigor. Nevertheless, for purpose of this study, the researcher used the original label for the standards, referring to the standards as the CCSS. This decision was made in light of the timing of Torlakson’s announcement, along with additional consideration being given to the fact that the national terminology still used for the Common Core is CCSS.

The motivation to identify a set of national standards cuts across political lines of affiliation (Kern, 2011). However, an emerging national debate around national standards calls into question the political and educational viability of these ideals (Barton, 2009). While the CCSS have gained traction and support in many states such as California, the long-term stability of these standards has yet to be determined (Hipsher, 2014; Kern, 2011; McCracken, 2014). Despite the controversy over the CCSS, the expectation for full implementation of the CCSS remains a top priority for California principals, with the literacy standards being a key focus in districts across California (Brown & Vargo, 2014).

The literacy standards, which include an emphasis on writing along with increased use of complex and informational text (Brown & Vargo, 2014), pose a challenge to California students who are already struggling with essential literacy skills.
Student achievement data collected from the California Department of Education (CDE) in 2012 on the California Standards Test (CST), a test consisting primarily of multiple-choice questions based on the 1997 state standards, revealed that only 57% of students in Grades 2-11 scored at a proficient or advanced level on the ELA portion of the CST. For California students who were considered to be socioeconomically disadvantaged (SED), only 35% achieved at a proficient or advanced level (CDE, 2012). Most disturbing were the low CST scores for California’s 902,376 English learners (ELs) in Grades 2-11, a meager 5% of whom scored at a proficient or advanced level (CDE, 2012). With students achieving proficiency in literacy at an alarmingly dismal level, the CCSS require teachers and the principals who lead them to understand and effectively instruct California students in order to improve the already low literacy rates for California students.

Likewise, in the area of mathematics, the CCSS mandate several key shifts. These shifts focus on fewer topics and increased depth; build greater coherence in topics and thinking across grade-level spans; develop higher levels of rigorous thinking that require students to authentically grasp mathematical concepts, number sense, and fluency; and relate real-life applications to problem solving (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.a). Students are expected to learn standards that progress from grade level to grade level in a coherent manner (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.a).

These expectations pose a number of challenges to teachers and principals that require a thorough examination, study, and internalization of the standards. This is especially problematic since in 2013, only half of the school districts in California
indicated that teachers had examined the standards in detail, while less than 20% of the teachers in California school districts had begun CCSS lesson planning (Warren & Murphy, 2014). This change in the instructional paradigm necessitated by the CCSS requires that educators and school leaders . . . make fundamental shifts in practice. Some have called these shifts monolithic in scope. For school leaders and counselors, implementing the CCSS is not about thinking out of the box. It is about transforming the box itself. (Achieve, College Summit, National Association of Secondary School Principals, & NAESP, 2013, p. 4)

Since the instructional changes due to the CCSS directly impact students, the responsibility to ensure that students are truly college and career ready falls with great weight on principals, regardless of the long-term ramifications of the CCSS. With the depth and rigor of the CCSS having arrived on the horizon for California schools, principals are now expected to influence teachers to significantly change their instructional strategies so that students can better grasp these challenging standards (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012). Principals have been entrenched in a consequential accountability model for over a decade that was based on the previous set of state standards (Kress et al., 2011). Such crucial changes in pedagogy create a sense of urgency for principals to make sense of the CCSS in order to influence teachers to change their instructional practices so students learn necessary 21st-century skills. Sensemaking occurs when the “current state of the world is different from the expected state of the world” (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409), such as what principals are currently experiencing as they lead their sites to implementing a new set of standards. The
difference between the previous standards and the CCSS creates a compelling case for principals to engage in sensemaking in order to facilitate instructional changes needed to support the CCSS.

**Problem Statement**

Recent research on the implementation of the CCSS has indicated that several problems exist within current educational settings. At the forefront of these challenges lies the fact that CCSS are new and therefore require teachers to use specific strategies and instructional skills to support students in reaching greater depths of knowledge (Hipsher, 2014). Compounding the complexity of instructional implementation of the CCSS is the fact that while the standards specify what should be taught, the standards do not specify a rigid curriculum for teaching the standards (Phillips & Wong, 2010). Likewise, the CCSS are based on assumptions that fundamentally change how teachers must teach (Bomer & Maloch, 2011). This further prompts the need to build teacher understanding of the CCSS along with increasing teacher knowledge of effective instructional strategies that move beyond worksheets, memorization of facts, and test preparation and toward the development of students’ critical thinking and depth of knowledge (Conley, 2011; McCracken, 2014).

Other contextual problems exist for principals challenged with the task of leading teachers through the implementation process of the CCSS. Because full implementation of the CCSS is expensive (Kober & Rentner, 2012), in 2013 Democratic Governor Jerry Brown agreed to place approximately $1.25 billion into the state budget over the course of the next 2 fiscal years (i.e., 2014-2016) to support CCSS implementation in California schools (Ujifusa & Sawchuk, 2014). Other costs include training teachers, creating
curriculum and assessments, and designing the technologies and network infrastructures that support the CCSS (Conley, 2011; Kober & Rentner, 2012). These are only a few of the fiscal implications presented by the CCSS that principals and educational leaders are attempting to resolve.

In addition to the fiscal challenges present within the context of the CCSS, additional issues abound. During the transition to the CCSS, principals must also pay attention to the emotional stress experienced by teachers as they implement the CCSS (Ujifusa & Sawchuk, 2014). Recent concerns voiced by teacher unions suggest that teachers are already feeling overwhelmed with the need to align their instruction to the CCSS as they teach standards for which their own comfort level is lacking (Ujifusa & Sawchuk, 2014).

Facilitating teacher change in instructional practices to align with the CCSS is a huge undertaking (Killion, 2012). The implementation of the CCSS will require that principals deeply understand the CCSS and how to best support their implementation in the classroom (Clifford & Mason, 2013; Killion, 2012). This undertaking is going to be daunting, since minimal resources have been allotted to prepare principals to acclimate to the changes required by the CCSS (Clifford & Mason, 2013). A current study indicated that a majority of principals questioned their level of preparation to manage the budgetary and instructional shifts prompted by the new standards (Maxwell, 2013). Furthermore, due to the novelty of the standards, there is limited research on the how they should be implemented (Kober & Rentner, 2012).

In view of such challenges, principals must develop sufficient knowledge and skills about the CCSS to provide instructional and professional development for teachers
to ensure a high caliber of instruction (Ovando & Ramirez, 2007) and to avoid potential “shipwrecks associated with the how and what of teaching” (Michalec, 2013, p. 35). In order to avoid pitfalls and ensure a smooth transition for their schools, principals must make sense of the standards and the instructional implications of the standards in order to facilitate the instructional changes in practices for their teachers. The magnitude of this undertaking is concerning as many principals reported feeling overlooked and unprepared as to how to facilitate the implementation of the CCSS (Gewertz, 2012). The question must be asked as to how school principals can effectively facilitate teacher instructional progress if principals themselves are unclear in their knowledge and understanding of the CCSS and the related instructional implications of the new standards. Therefore, they need to make sense of what the standards demand and what their leadership actions should be in order to facilitate these pivotal changes in instruction.

**Purpose of the Study**

Research from the field has confirmed that principal leadership matters in schools (Glasman & Heck, 1992; Hallinger & Heck, 1996). In addition, research has also indicated that teachers influence student learning through their instructional practices (May & Supovitz, 2011; Supovitz, Sirinides, & May, 2010). In this unprecedented time in education in which a new set of standards will be implemented, the quality of leadership that principals provide to teachers is more critical than ever (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012). Among numerous other challenges principals face with the CCSS, prompting teachers to change literacy-based instructional practices is at the forefront of priorities for school principals (Brown & Vargo, 2014). Without changes in instructional processes, the CCSS will not be effectively taught to students (Learning Sciences...
All students have a right to a cognitively challenging education (Tienken, Goldberg, & DiRocco, 2010), regardless of the political and other contextual factors surrounding the educational system (Kern, 2011).

The shift in the instructional paradigm necessitates a fundamentally different approach to how teachers deliver instruction; teachers need to know the standards and take the initiative in figuring out the best ways to teach the standards (Drew, 2012). Such changes have been described as requiring teachers to build inner core strength as they transition to the CCSS (Michalec, 2013). It is, therefore, fundamentally important that principals are savvy as they prepare teachers to use instructional strategies that are aligned to the CCSS (Killion, 2012). As stated by Killion (2012), it is necessary that principals work with their teachers to “build understanding of the change process, hold firm to the vision and goals, and provide moral, emotional, and intellectual support to staff to maintain their commitment to the desired outcome of every student [becoming] college- and career-ready” (p. 27). Lessons learned from this initial phase of implementation can help guide principal leadership practices in the upcoming years.

How principals make sense of the CCSS and their instructional implications in order to influence teachers to change instructional practices to meet the demands of the new standards warrants investigation. According to Weick et al. (2005), “To focus on sensemaking is to portray organizing as the experience of being thrown into an ongoing, unknowable, unpredictable streaming of experience in search of answers to the question, ‘what’s the story?’” (p. 410). Through a narrative inquiry research methodology, this study allowed selected principals to tell their stories related to their experiences as leaders of early CCSS implementation. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine how
principals who were early implementers of the CCSS engaged in sensemaking (Weick, 2009) in order to facilitate the improvement of instructional practices needed to support effective implementation of the CCSS. This researcher determined how principals who were early implementers made sense of the standards, along with the implications for teaching and learning, in order to guide their leadership decisions and why principals made the leadership decisions they did when attempting to facilitate changes in teacher practices to meet the demands of the CCSS.

**Research Questions**

Overarching Question: How have school principals made sense of the instructional implications of the CCSS? The following research questions were addressed:

1. How did the process of sensemaking guide school principals in their leadership decision making when facilitating the alignment of teacher practices to meet the instructional demands of the CCSS?

2. What types of leadership decisions did school principals make, and why did they make these decisions, when facilitating the alignment of teacher practices to meet the demands of the CCSS?

**Definitions of Terms**

In order to increase understanding of the research, the following glossary of terms is provided. These definitions clarify frequently used educational terms, as well as terms more recently introduced to the field of education.

**Academic Performance Index (API).** An API score is a weighted number based on student performance on ELA and mathematics for Grades 2 through 8. For Grades 9
through 11, the API is calculated based on ELA, mathematics, history/social science, and science. API scores range from 0 to 1,000, with a score of 800 considered the target for California schools (Linn, 2005).

**Academic vocabulary.** The term academic vocabulary refers to words used in the various content areas (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.a).

**Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).** The AYP is a growth model that measures an increase in the number of students scoring proficient and advanced from year to year (Choi et al., 2007).

**California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) System.** The CAASPP is California’s statewide student assessment system that includes the Smarter Balanced Assessments, Summative Assessments, Interim Assessments, Alternate Assessments, and the Digital Library (CDE, 2015).

**Common Core State Standards (CCSS).** The CCSS are a set of college- and career-oriented standards for kindergarten through 12th grade in ELA/literacy and mathematics that were implemented in California in 2014-2015 (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.a).

**Early implementers.** Districts that designed a plan for the rollout of the CCSS that started during the 2011-2012 school year are considered early implementers (Brown & Vargo, 2014).

**Instructional shifts.** Instructional shifts are pedagogical changes in instructional practices needed in order to implement the CCSS well (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.a).
No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. NCLB is a federally mandated performance-based accountability system that utilized the results of reading, mathematics, and science tests to determine the quality of schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2002a).

Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). The PARCC is a group of 19 states that collaborated to create a set of assessments designed to measure if students are on track to succeed in college and in their careers (PARCC, 2014).

Professional development. Professional development provides continuing opportunities for teachers to learn and increase their instructional knowledge (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011).

Professional learning communities (PLCs). PLCs are collaborative teams where members work interdependently in order to achieve common goals that are aimed at increasing learning for all (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006).

Sensemaking. Sensemaking is the process of “turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409).

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC). The SBAC is a state-led consortium working together to create next-generation assessments that are aligned to the CCSS in order to precisely measure student progress on college and career readiness (SBAC, 2012).
**Standards and accountability movement.** Beginning in the 1980s, the standards and accountability movement refers to the nationwide trend toward educational standards and accountability in public schools (Lineburg, 2010).

**Significance of the Study**

The new CCSS and related assessments require changes to curriculum and instruction in many American schools and increase the need for principal influence in a pivotal way. In light of the CCSS, principals are charged with the responsibility of influencing teachers to make the necessary instructional changes to support student acquisition and understanding of the new standards. Since the CCSS were designed to be robust, relevant to the real world, and reflective of the knowledge and skills young people need to be successful in college and careers (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.a), the standards call for a different, unfamiliar instructional approach to teaching and learning. Eilers and D’Amico (2012) explained,

> The Standards are a roadmap for schools, teachers, and parents. However, unlike some past initiatives that dictated curriculum, assessment instruments, and pacing of instruction, these Standards do not dictate how teachers must teach. . . . School leaders have the responsibility of deciding how best to meet these Standards by moving faculty and staff to uncharted territory. (p. 46)

With the expectation for full implementation of the CCSS in 2014-2015, the testing program in this nation’s schools has also changed. As educators have learned from the standards and accountability movement, such critical assessments guide instructional practices. The new testing program facing California’s students is governed by the SBAC. With the new testing program, schools are required to shift from
administering paper-and-pencil, multiple-choice tests to administering the online tests (Peery, 2013). The SBAC includes short constructed responses, extended constructed responses, and performance tasks (Peery, 2013; SBAC, 2012). The SBAC will be administered to students in Grades 3-8 and 11. On the SBAC, students will justify their answers, interact with multiple texts, and construct written answers that include evidence while taking tests that are also computer-adaptive (Peery, 2013). The CST was based on the 1997 standards and included largely multiple-choice questions, while the SBAC is much more challenging and rigorous, requiring students to write, cite evidence from text, and manipulate test items (Peery, 2013). In short, students must be able to demonstrate skills that are analytical and robust when taking the SBAC. To prepare students to meet the demands of the CCSS as demonstrated by success on the SBAC, teachers must be prepared to change their instructional practices to support student acquisition of the new standards (Peery, 2013).

An examination of what principals are doing to prepare teachers to make necessary instructional shifts for the CCSS has potential to shed light on effective leadership practices that are useful in the unchartered educational era of the 21st century. School districts within California will find relevance in the results of this study since districts are charged with CCSS oversight and implementation of refined instructional strategies appropriate for CCSS instruction. Likewise, school principals will benefit from the findings in that they will be useful in informing their understanding of the CCSS mandates, administrative practices, and instructional leadership strategies needed to facilitate instructional changes. Importantly, students and parents will benefit as principals increase their knowledge and understanding of leadership actions that may
result in higher levels of student achievement and college and career readiness. Finally, scholars and researchers will benefit from the study design and findings as they continue to examine this critical issue.

Assumptions

This study was predicated on assumptions that had potential to impact the study. An assumption is something that the researcher accepts as being true without having definitive proof (Ellis & Levy, 2009). The following were the assumptions in this study:

1. Principals and teachers are familiar to some extent with the CCSS, including the instructional implications associated with the CCSS.

2. Principals exert similar levels of influence on teachers and their instructional practices.

3. The impact of a principal’s influence will ensue over the long term rather than gradually diminishing over time.

4. District-level guidance, support, and policies regarding the implementation of the CCSS and professional development activities will not interfere with the principal’s leadership.

5. District-level leaders in the study provided a similar level of guidance, support, and professional development to principals and teachers regarding the implementation of the CCSS.

6. The six principal influence strategies described in the conceptual framework are valid, are reliable, and can accurately and effectively explain the phenomenon of principal leadership as it relates to the implementation of the CCSS and associated changes in pedagogy.
Limitations

Several limitations are present in this study. Limitations are possible problems or weaknesses identified by the researcher that might impact the results of the study (Creswell, 2008). The following are the limitations of this study:

1. The duration of this study was time-limited. Therefore, the longitudinal effects of the principals’ influence on teacher instruction are not known.

2. Various levels of knowledge and understanding of the CCSS were present among teachers, even before the principal begins to implement leadership initiatives.

3. Some teachers may already be competent in the instructional strategies required for the CCSS and will, therefore, not require or respond to the principal’s leadership efforts in the same way as teachers who have not altered their instructional practices as required by the CCSS.

4. Teacher motivation to change varied, and teachers responded to the principal’s leadership in unique ways.

5. Principals in this study possessed various levels of knowledge and understanding regarding the CCSS.

6. The focus of the study was not on examining differences among principals who worked in different grade levels (e.g., elementary, middle, and high school) but rather on examining principals who had been successful as early adopters in implementing the CCSS at their schools.

7. The characteristics of school culture varied among schools selected for the sample.
Delimitations

Delimitations denote “the boundaries of the study, and ways in which the findings may lack generalizability” (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005, Kindle Location 1453). In this study, the following delimitations exist:

1. This study was limited to a small number of participants (principals) from three schools within the state of California. As such, the findings do not represent all principals within California and the United States.

2. This study represented one researcher’s investigation of principal experiences in facilitating teacher changes in practices as deemed appropriate for the CCSS. As the CCSS are relatively new to California, future studies will shed additional light on this topic.

Summary

The importance of the school principal is documented in the literature (Leithwood & Wahlstrom, 2008). With the expectation for the CCSS to be fully implemented in California in 2014-2015, the need for principals to shift their focus to the instructional and curricular transformation required by the new standards is urgent (Killion, 2012). In order for principals to effectively lead their teachers in this paradigm shift, principals must first make sense of the CCSS and the instructional implications of these standards. This is problematic in that principals must increase their own understanding of the new standards while simultaneously guiding their teachers through the process of aligning instructional practices to the CCSS. It is also essential that principals work to ensure that teachers teach in a manner that prepares students for the rigors of high school, college, and careers (Barton, 2009). This study examined how principals who were early
implementers of the CCSS navigated through these pressing demands. Thus, this narrative study elucidated the experiences of the selected principals by providing a platform for these principals to share their stories about how they made sense of the CCSS in order to facilitate instructional alignment of teacher practices to the CCSS.

**Organization of the Study**

The dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 included an overview of the study. This chapter included the background of the study, problem and purpose of the study, research questions, definitions of terms related to the topic, significance, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations. Chapter 2 describes the conceptual framework and summarizes existing research on the importance of the principal, importance of the teacher, and educational reform. Following the literature review, Chapter 3 outlines the methodology for the study and provides justification for the selected methods and research design. Next, Chapter 4 presents the researcher’s findings embedded into a narrative that provides a platform for the researcher to clarify and summarize the research findings, thereby shedding light on the researcher’s experience. Concluding the study is Chapter 5, in which the researcher reflects on the study and provides conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The principal’s role is to lead the school’s teachers in a process of learning to improve their teaching, while learning alongside them. (Fullan, 2014, p. 55)

Chapter 2 provides an overview of school reform in the United States, including the CCSS initiative, as well as a review of literature on the importance of the teacher, the importance of the school principal, and sensemaking theory. As schools around the country grapple with the challenge of CCSS implementation in 2014-2015, principals seek clarification as to how they can sift through the depth and breadth of the new standards in order to increase their own understanding of the instructional implications of the CCSS (Maxwell, 2013). As can be expected, even principals who have been strong, confident leaders may well experience dissonance regarding what actions they need to take to facilitate such changes at their sites. Many principals ponder how to confidently and skillfully facilitate the instructional shifts demanded by the standards when research has indicated that principals feel so unprepared (Gewertz, 2012). The question arises as to why so many principals feel “left behind” with regard to such a monumental change that will impact their daily work and level of influence as school leaders (Maxwell, 2013). Clearly, the implementation of the CCSS presents a gap between what needs to be and what exists—a gap that “cannot be closed by existing modes of operating” (Ancona, 2012, p. 4).

These questions, while not all-inclusive, underscore a critical need for principals to engage in sensemaking of the CCSS in order to provide the necessary leadership at their sites during this critical transition to the new standards. The researcher applied sensemaking theory (Weick, 1995) because of the link to education regarding leadership,
organizations, and school reform. Since individuals do not assign the same meaning even to the same events (e.g., interpreting the instructional implications of the CCSS and determining what leadership actions best support effective implementation of the standards), sensemaking is needed to understand how the varied meanings are derived during times of change or disruption (Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010). Such a glimpse into how principals decide on their leadership actions when responding to a new set of national standards formed an appropriate focus for this study.

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to review the research relevant to the questions that guided this study. Therefore, this chapter begins with an overview of historical and current school reform initiatives, including the CCSS, while highlighting research relevant to the importance of the teacher and the principal. Additionally, due to the fundamental importance of the principal’s leadership actions within the context of the organization, which in this case is the school setting during this critical time of transition to a new set of standards, sensemaking theory is also explored in Chapter 2.

**Research Questions**

In order to facilitate improvement of instructional practices to support effective implementation of the CCSS, this researcher sought to determine how principals who were early implementers made sense of the standards while also determining what leadership actions were needed to prepare teachers for effective implementation of the standards. The following research questions were addressed:

**Overarching Question:** How have school principals made sense of the instructional implications of the CCSS?
1. How did the process of sensemaking guide school principals in their leadership decision making when facilitating the alignment of teacher practices to meet the instructional demands of the CCSS?

2. What types of leadership decisions did school principals make, and why did they make these decisions when facilitating the alignment of teacher practices to meet the demands of the CCSS?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was grounded in the need for principals to first make sense of the instructional implications of the CCSS prior to making leadership decisions aimed at aligning teacher practices to the CCSS, as well as in the need for principals to make sense of how to influence instructional change specific to the CCSS at their sites. Although grounded in organizational theory, Weick’s (1995) theoretical framework of sensemaking included cultural and cognitive perspectives with sensemaking that are useful for consideration when explaining how leaders make sense of and take action in facilitating instructional change at their sites in response to reform initiatives, such as the CCSS.

The process of sensemaking is more concerned with the relationship of “action and interpretation rather than the influence of evaluation on choice” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). Weick et al. (2005) reiterated, “To focus on sensemaking is to portray organizing as the experience of being thrown into an ongoing, unknowable, unpredictable streaming of experience in search of answers to the question, ‘what’s the story?’” (p. 410). As noted by Janger (2006), “When schools change in response to reform efforts, we see more dynamic, visible instances of sensemaking” (p. 40). Therefore, since
research from the field has indicated that principals are feeling largely unprepared to lead such a fundamental endeavor at their sites (Maxwell, 2013), the need for principals to engage in sensemaking of new standards and sensemaking of their corresponding actions is pressing.

For this study, the researcher was concerned with how principals’ actions and interpretations of the CCSS as part of the sensemaking process guided them in their decisions regarding how to integrate the leadership influence strategies described by Eilers and D’Amico (2012) as they responded to the CCSS mandates to lead instructional changes. As the CCSS trigger the need for principals to understand the CCSS so that they can determine how instructional practices must be changed, principals must also make decisions about how they will influence change in teacher instructional practices to support the implementation of the standards. As principals execute instructional influence, their actions may include establishing a clear purpose, determining priorities including the allocation of resources, aligning faculty and staff, facilitating professional discourse, encouraging risk taking, and providing feedback (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012). In other words, after individuals (principals) make sense of the issue, they must then determine what action must occur next (Boudes & Laroche, 2009).

The need to identify how principals made sense of the CCSS, determined necessary instructional changes, and then engaged in the aforementioned leadership actions formed the rationale for the conceptual underpinnings of this study. This framework also included a close link between individual sensemaking and organizational sensemaking. According to Weick (1995), “Sensemaking is about authoring as well as reading” (p. 7). In essence, the principals’ interpretation of the instructional implications
of the CCSS combined with their interpretation of the organizational aspects of the school program, resulting in the authoring of their leadership actions. The conceptual framework (see Figure 1) was based on the reciprocal relationship of these variables. This framework was also based on the assumption that improved teacher instructional practices aimed at teaching the CCSS would lead to increased student achievement.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

Organization of the Literature Review

This literature review focuses on an array of themes related to CCSS implementation, including (a) the implications of historical and modern educational reform on the school setting; (b) an overview of the CCSS and the ways that these standards will impact assessment and instruction; (c) the importance of the classroom teacher, with subsections describing teacher influence on student achievement and on
peer instructional practices; (d) the importance of the school principal, with key findings from research regarding principal influence on student learning and teacher instructional practices; and (e) the process of sensemaking as it pertains to organizational theory (Weick, 1995, 2005). A common thread throughout the literature review includes leadership strategies that research has demonstrated are effective in facilitating educational change in teacher practices with the intent of increasing student learning. These five areas of foci combine to form a logical arrangement of information, thereby demonstrating the existing need for principals to make sense of the CCSS in order to provide leadership needed to ensure effective implementation of the new standards.

**Educational reform.**

*Historical perspective on educational reform.* Educational reform is not a new concept. Within the field of education, reform refers to the “planned efforts to change schools in order to correct perceived social and educational problems” (Tyack & Cuban, 1995, p. 4). Even in the early 1900s, public education advocate John Dewey (1938) alluded to the challenges of implementing educational reform by asserting, “The road of the new education is not an easier one to follow than the old road but a more strenuous and difficult one” (p. 90). During the mid-1990s, Tyack and Cuban (1995) emphasized that regardless of the type of reform, the reformation process is complicated, requiring that problems be discovered, solutions generated, new policies created, and change institutionalized. While reform has historically occurred in all arenas of society with the intent of fixing perceived problems or making critical changes in policies or processes, Cuban (2012) elucidated the heightened responsibility that has been placed on schools to solve national, political, social, and economic issues.
The history of educational reform attempts is expansive, and reform initiatives continue to be developed to this day. In the fourth edition of *The Meaning of Educational Change*, Fullan (2007) highlighted the key educational reform initiatives that occurred from the early 1950s through 2007. Fullan described the period following the launching of Sputnik in 1957 as the “adoption era” (p. 5). Throughout the late 1950s and into the 1960s, the emphasis in education was on increasing innovations, creating curricular reforms, and developing organizational reconfigurations, such as open-plan teaching, team teaching, and flexible scheduling (Fullan, 2007). During the late 1960s and the 1970s, there was an increased emphasis on addressing equity issues in education. Referring to the work of earlier researchers (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), Elmore (2000) described the 1970s as a time in education in which loose coupling emerged. The term loose coupling referred to the important instructional decisions pertaining to what was taught, how it was taught, expectations for learning outcomes, and evaluation of these outcomes that resided in individual classrooms instead of the larger organization (Elmore, 2000). It was also in 1975 that a federal statute, later renamed the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), was created in order to ensure that students with disabilities received a free, appropriate public education (Jennings, 2012). Subsequently, the nationwide trend toward standards and accountability began to emerge in the 1980s and continues today (Lineburg, 2010).

In their analysis of federal policies stemming from the NCLB era, DeBray-Pelot and McGuinn (2009) indicated that the change process of educational reform was accelerated following the 1983 publication of the widely publicized report *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This report about
America’s educational system raised concerns regarding the levels of student achievement and the economic impact that was likely to follow an underperforming generation of students (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). Although the reform that initially followed the release of *A Nation at Risk* was largely confined to the state level, the reform initiatives during the 1990s brought the passage of Goals 2000 and revisions to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), a federal act that encouraged the development of standards, testing, and accountability (DeBray-Pelot & McGuinn, 2009). Other reform trends that occurred during the 1990s included the school choice movement, an effort based on the proposition that parents should be able to choose, at the expense of the public, their child’s school of attendance (S. A. Faulkner & Cook, 2006).

**Standards and accountability movement.** The standards and accountability movement contributed to the unrelenting focus on achieving higher test scores. Despite the heated debate over educational issues that existed between political parties, NCLB was passed on January 8, 2002, when then-President George W. Bush signed the NCLB Act into law. Under NCLB, states were required to implement accountability systems for all public schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2002a). Such accountability systems were implemented with the specific intent of increasing student performance on standards-based assessments (Cotton, 2003; Marks & Nance, 2007). Subsequently, standards-based reform became a “fundamental part of the architecture of policy and governance in American education” (Elmore, 2000, p. 4).

The federal NCLB was a performance-based accountability system that relied on tests in reading, mathematics, and science in order to judge the quality of schools. NCLB focused on summative test results rather than formative approaches that measured levels
of student learning. This law required students in Grade 3 through Grade 8 to be tested annually (Kress et al., 2011), while students in Grades 10-12 had to be tested at least once during this grade-level span (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Since NCLB was a federal law, any state or school district that refused to comply with the mandates of NCLB was subject to losing millions of dollars designated for the most at-risk students, otherwise known as Title I funds (Heinecke et al., 2003; Ravitch, 2010). This new system of standards and accountability held schools responsible for student performance on standardized tests that were based on state-adopted standards. Under NCLB, “Schools were rated, and schools identified as ‘underperforming’ were subject to public humiliation, state sanctions, loss of accreditation, state takeover, and the reassignment of school personnel” (Heinecke et al., 2003, p. 8).

This movement also prompted additional models of accountability, such as the federally initiated AYP, which was part of the NCLB law. In accordance with the new accountability structures implemented by NCLB, schools were expected to make AYP. AYP was calculated by first identifying the starting point for the percentage of students performing at a certain level based on standardized test scores and then by setting yearly objectives and measurable goals, with the final target being for all students to reach the proficient level (U.S. Department of Education, 2002b).

Individual states also implemented their own systems of accountability. Prompted by the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) in 1999, the California-mandated API was put into effect (CDE, 2014). An API score was a single number that ranged from 200 to 1,000. API scores were based on the results from the statewide standardized tests and reflected the performance level of a school, a local education
agency (LEA), or a student group. The intent of the API was to measure academic performance and prompt improvement in schools, with the target being a score of at least 800, which was the API target that the state of California set for all schools to meet.

Schools that did not attain an API score of 800 had to meet annual growth targets (CDE, 2014).

The standards and accountability movement placed a tremendous amount of pressure on schools and the principals in charge of the schools (Cooley & Shen, 2003). Skinner and Feder (2014) maintained that while standards drive instruction, curriculum should be used to “operationalize the standards” (p. 28). According to Heinecke et al. (2003), “Common components of state accountability systems included (1) aligning standards and assessments, (2) rating schools and reporting school or district performance, and (3) creating consequences for schools that fail to perform adequately” (p. 7). One impact of the emphasis on testing resulted in instructional strategies being adjusted to support students in mastering content that would be assessed by the standardized tests (Cuban, 2012; S. A. Faulkner & Cook, 2006). These findings also indicated that principals felt external pressure to make sure that their schools met or exceeded established achievement goals (Cooley & Shen, 2003). Other research revealed that principals viewed the controlling mandates, regulations, and sanctions employed by the state stemming from the accountability structures as negative policy levers (Marks & Nance, 2007). Both incentives and corrective measures were taken based on whether the schools met performance targets, thereby being indicative of the systematic nature of the educational reform process (Cooley & Shen, 2003).
**Common Core State Standards.** The quest for new standards and a reform in instructional pedagogy has been brewing in America for quite some time. More than a decade before the adoption of the CCSS, Rohlen (1999) voiced the need for instructional practices to shift by asserting, “Schools need to teach learning processes that better fit the way work is evolving. Above all, this means teaching the skills and habits of mind that are essential to problem-solving, especially where many minds need to interact” (pp. 251-252). Following a decade under NCLB, former Secretary of Education Diane Ravitch (2010) elaborated on the negative effects of testing by claiming that the goal was to achieve higher scores, not to measure the acquired knowledge of other subjects (e.g., history, science, literature, geography, and the arts) that were not required for the accountability system. This line of logic from multiple stakeholders in the education community was instrumental in the development of the CCSS.

In a joint effort steered by the NGA Center, the CCSSO, teachers, school administrators, and additional experts, the CCSS were established. The Common Core State Standards Initiative created the CCSS in a state-led mission to create consensus on establishing the expectations for the knowledge and skills that K-12 students should possess (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). On June 2, 2010, the final CCSS were released. The California State Board of Education (SBE) adopted the CCSS on August 2, 2010. As of June 2015, there were 43 states along with the District of Columbia, four additional U.S. territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) that had adopted the CCSS (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.a).
Prior to the adoption of the CCSS, inconsistency in standards occurred between states, as each state was responsible for creating its own standards. The need for consistency across the states was echoed by a comparative review of the previous state standards and the CCSS in a study funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Louis Calder Foundation, the Brookhill Foundation, and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (Carmichael, Martino, Porter-Magee, & Wilson, 2010). In another comparative analysis of the differences between the CCSS and the previous standards, Porter et al. (2011) proposed the benefits of establishing national standards. According to Porter et al., such benefits included shared expectations, focus, efficiency, and quality.

*Shared expectations.* By implementing national standards, every state will be consistent with shared expectations for student learning. Students who live in Ohio, for example, would be exposed to the same learning expectations as students residing in Mississippi (Porter et al., 2011).

*Focus.* The implementation of the CCSS will provide greater focus than what is typical of state standards, especially in the area of mathematics (Porter et al., 2011).

*Efficiency.* Instead of having 50 states create their own assessments, it is more efficient for the two testing consortia (i.e., PARCC and SBAC) to develop assessments. Efficiency is then extended to connect with other sectors of the education business through the development of curricular materials, professional development guides for teachers, and higher level education for future teachers (Porter et al., 2011).

*Quality.* Having only one or two assessments that are aligned to the same standards increases the potential for delivering the assessments electronically and in a
computer-adaptive manner, thereby producing more engaging and animated assessments and reducing floor and ceiling effects (Porter et al., 2011).

To remedy the inconsistencies in quality teaching throughout the nation, states could identify up to 15% additional standards, while at least 85% of the standards consist of the CCSS (Achieve, 2010). This ensures that the standards are of the same high caliber across the country.

The CCSS are distinctively different from the 1997 standards that were taught in public schools in America until the emergence of the CCSS (Carmichael et al., 2010; Porter et al., 2011). The CCSS are aligned to college and work expectations; are clear, understandable, and consistent; include rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher-order skills; build on strengths and lessons of previous state standards; are informed by other top-performing countries so that all students are prepared to succeed in the global economy and society; and are evidence based (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.a). The intent for these standards was articulated as follows:

These standards are not intended to be new names for old ways of doing business. They are a call to take the next step. It is time for states to build on lessons learned from two decades of standards based reform. It is time to recognize that standards are not just promises to our children, but promises we intend to keep. (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010b, p. 5)

The CCSS include the standards for English Language Arts (ELA) and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects as well as the Standards for Mathematical Practice (SMPs). For ELA and literacy, the standards are organized by
reading, writing, speaking/listening, and language strands. These standards are anchored in college and career readiness expectations, with the goal that students will graduate from high school prepared to succeed in initial college courses without needing additional remediation (King, 2011). The college and career readiness anchor standards cascade down from high school into kindergarten. As such, the college and career readiness standards are backward mapped and traced from anchors across the K-12 continuum (King, 2011).

There is broad consensus among states that have implemented the CCSS that these standards are more rigorous than their previous standards in ELA or math and are more likely to improve students’ skills in these areas (Kober & Rentner, 2012). Carmichael et al. (2010) closely examined the quality of the CCSS and determined that the current standards in all 50 states were inferior to the CCSS, with the exception of the ELA standards in California, the District of Columbia, and Indiana. Furthermore, Carmichael et al. indicated that out of 102 comparisons in 51 jurisdictions across two subjects, the CCSS were found to be “clearly superior seventy-six times” (p. 3).

**Assessments.** Since the adoption of NCLB in 2001, the focus for this nation’s schools has been centered on demonstrating student mastery of the state standards as indicated by standardized test scores. These standardized tests were primarily multiple-choice and required students to “bubble” a single answer choice for each question. Under NCLB, many teachers prepared students for high-stakes testing by relying on test preparation materials in the weeks that preceded testing, along with narrowing the curriculum to emphasize ELA and mathematics (S. A. Faulkner & Cook, 2006). In this new era of the CCSS, it is unlikely that such basic skill review will effectively prepare
students for success with the CCSS and on related assessments, such as the statewide SBAC test.

The SBAC was deployed in 2014-2015 (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.a; Troia & Olinghouse, 2013). California students took the SBAC test, which included a computer-adaptive component and a performance task (SBAC, 2012). In an effort to prepare for the first baseline SBAC test in 2014-2015, schools in California administered the SBAC field test during the 2013-2014 school year. This administration of the SBAC field test in 2013-2014 served as a trial run in which the assessment was administered to over 3.1 million California students (Association of California School Administrators, 2014). Feedback from the field test of the SBAC indicated that the level of preparation for schools to be able to accommodate the bandwidth, hardware, and infrastructure requirements needed for the SBAC test widely varied across California schools (Association of California School Administrators, 2014). The results of the SBAC field test regarding student performance on the SBAC field test were not provided to schools or students. For the 2014-2015 school year, California schools administered the SBAC test to collect baseline data for students in Grades 3-8 and 11.

The need to implement the testing program as specified by the SBAC test left states scrambling to equip districts with the funds and technology needed to administer such assessments by 2014-2015 (Skinner & Feder, 2014). In addition, the development of these assessments has also been quite costly. Funding from the U.S. Department of Education for the creation of the aligned CCSS assessments included the distribution of $160 million to the SBAC (Porter et al., 2011).
**Instructional shifts needed for the CCSS.** According to Clifford and Mason (2013), “Implementation of the new standards is an equally critical, if not more ambitious, step that requires local educators to rethink curriculum, instruction, and assessment; explain changes to parents and community members; and change instructional practices” (p. 2). Teaching in a manner consistent with the rigor of the CCSS will require teachers to expand their instructional toolkits. Teachers will not only be required to teach more rigorous content to the CCSS but also to engage students in more challenging work within the classroom setting (Grossman, Reyna, & Shipton, 2011). The CCSS will require teachers to instruct in greater depth, as opposed to teaching a wide breadth of standards that include teaching higher level thinking skills (Learning Sciences Marzano Center, 2014).

Since the emergence of NCLB, teachers have often used test-like items and repetition of basic skills to prepare students for standardized tests (Firestone, Schorr, & Monfils, 2004; Menken, 2006). Even with English Learners (ELs), teachers taught language skills in test-like approaches by focusing instruction on test content and related skills (Menken, 2006). This preceding instructional approach is not aligned to the rigor and depth of CCSS. Considering the requirements of the CCSS and the need for teacher changes in instructional practices, the CCSS will require more clarity in the progressions of knowledge being addressed in class, more application of knowledge by students along with more and deeper inferential thinking, and the creation of sound evidence for conclusions and claims. Finally, the CCSS [will] require students to constantly evaluate the validity and accuracy of their thinking and beliefs. . . . These efforts on the part of
the teacher should disclose a clear sequence or progression of facts, details, and lower-order skills to more robust generalizations, principles, and processes. At the end of a lesson, students should be able to describe how the details of the lesson build to support bigger ideas and processes. (Learning Sciences Marzano Center, 2014, p. 4)

Districts have faced many challenges with the implementation of the CCSS. One report prepared by the Center on Education Policy described an investigation that tracked the progress of 37 states and the District of Columbia in implementing the CCSS. The authors, Kober and Rentner (2012), summarized the findings of a survey conducted over a 3-month window occurring in 2011. For this survey, deputy superintendents or their designees reported information about their states’ strategies, policies, and challenges during the second year of CCSS implementation (Kober & Rentner, 2012). The findings indicated that while all the participating states prepared professional development for teachers, 27% of the states attempted to influence teacher instructional practices by aligning teacher preparation practices with the CCSS, 66% were either in the process of refining or developing educator evaluation procedures to hold educators accountable for student mastery of the CCSS, and 61% were developing and implementing teacher induction programs for new teachers (Kober & Rentner, 2012). Professional development for teachers was cited as a practice districts were implementing, but there was no mention of how school principals were facilitating changes to ensure a smooth transition to the CCSS (Kober & Rentner, 2012).

With this in mind, principals bear the responsibility of guiding faculty into the “uncharted territory” of the CCSS (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012). The principal’s guidance
is critically important during this transition to the new standards. Without clear direction from the principal and other school leaders, teachers will likely experience frustration (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012), as these new standards will impact instruction (Hess & McShane, 2013).

**Instructional shifts in ELA.** An in-depth look at the CCSS in ELA revealed that there are significant instructional shifts that must occur in order for students to access the standards and for teachers to be able to effectively teach the CCSS. Such instructional shifts in ELA prompt a need for teachers to change or implement new instructional practices in order to effectively teach the CCSS. These instructional practices include building knowledge and literacy in the disciplines, close reading of complex text using a staircase of complexity, text-based answers and evidence, writing from sources with evidence, and academic vocabulary (EngageNY, 2012).

**Building knowledge and literacy in the disciplines.** To support building knowledge and literacy in the disciplines, teachers will need to emphasize literacy experiences when planning lessons, thereby utilizing texts from across content areas (EngageNY, 2012). Science and social studies teachers must emphasize domain-specific texts, as students will be required to learn from what they read (McCabe, 2012).

**Close reading of text using a staircase of complexity.** In order to assist students in gaining access to complex text, teachers must guide students through the process of doing close reads. A close read suggests that the reader is paying greater attention to what the text says, what it means, and its implications (Neuman & Roskos, 2013). During a close read, students read the primary text containing critical information while the teacher instructs students on how to read carefully while providing scaffolds for below-grade-
level students (McCabe, 2012). This contrasts to current practices of middle-grade teachers in that these teachers tend to gravitate to narrative reading and writing instead of teaching in a manner that emphasizes reading multiple and complex texts (Phillips & Wong, 2010). Therefore, an emphasis must be placed on challenging students to read difficult texts (Neuman & Roskos, 2013). Materials and resources used for close reading should include a greater emphasis on informational texts, such as biographies or books that provide information and concepts (Neuman & Roskos, 2013). Teachers will need to provide specialized reading skills that are related to learning about history/social studies and science/technical subjects (Neuman & Roskos, 2013).

*Text-based evidence and answers.* It will also be necessary for teachers across content areas to teach using evidence-based practices (EBP) for writing instruction and assessment (Troia & Olinghouse, 2013). Teachers must plan lessons that will provide students with opportunities to have rich and rigorous conversations that delve into a common text (McCabe, 2012). In addition, teachers must insist that the instruction stays connected to the source of the text, preparing students to develop the practice of making evidentiary arguments in conversation and writing as a form of assessing the text (McCabe, 2012).

*Writing from sources with evidence.* Writing instruction must shift to emphasize using evidence with the intent of informing or developing an argument rather than writing narrative or other types of decontextualized prompts (McCabe, 2012). While narrative writing instruction must still be provided by the teacher, the teacher must support students in developing skills and writing arguments that respond to events, ideas,
facts, and assertions that are presented in the texts that they read, all while also ensuring that students master text structures and write for a purpose (McCabe, 2012).

**Academic vocabulary.** Teaching academic vocabulary includes teaching terminology and complex grammatical structures along with teaching students how to engage in sophisticated forms of discourse (Maxwell, 2013). For this to occur, teachers will need to prepare lessons that assist students in building transferable vocabulary needed to access grade-level complex texts (EngageNY, 2012; McCabe, 2012). The CCSS call for students to be able to cite evidence from the text, analyze it, and provide written and oral responses with sophisticated language (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, teachers must also provide time for students to orally use newly acquired academic language during instruction. Students must not only be taught key vocabulary words, but they must also form evidentiary arguments using academic language based on the text when speaking and writing (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010a). This will be an adjustment for middle-grade teachers, as they are not accustomed to instructing students on how to present and defend arguments, something that they must learn to do for the CCSS (Phillips & Wong, 2010).

**Digital literacy.** Teachers who are not yet proficient with the use of technology must improve their own technological skill set in order to increase the digital literacy of their students. In order to provide the best instruction with or without technology, many teachers may also need to improve their own content-area knowledge in order to help their students gain higher level knowledge and skills (Grossman et al., 2011).

**Instructional shifts in mathematics.** Sharp changes in the way mathematics is taught are called for by the CCSS (V. N. Faulkner, 2013). Guided by the overarching
SMPs, teachers will be required to teach at a deeper level in which conceptual understanding is built as students progress through each grade. The SMPs describe the ways that students are expected to engage with mathematics as they develop mathematical expertise and maturity throughout the K-12 continuum (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.b). In addition, the SMPs combine procedure and understanding in order to foster a flexible knowledge base from which students can interact with mathematics (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.b). There are eight SMPs (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.b):

1. Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them.
2. Reason abstractly and quantitatively.
3. Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.
4. Model with mathematics.
5. Use appropriate tools strategically.
6. Attend to precision.
7. Look for and make use of structure.
8. Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning. (“Standards,” para. 1-8)

Instruction in mathematics must emphasize an increased depth of knowledge that includes fewer standards while the teacher focuses on developing student mastery, skills, and applications to the real world (Hipsher, 2014). Three key instructional shifts in mathematics should guide educators in how mathematics is taught. The first instructional shift includes focusing on fewer topics while developing the major concepts from each grade level, thereby ensuring coherence in linking mathematical topics and how students think about these topics across the grade levels (Common Core State Standards Initiative,
n.d.b). In this respect, each standard that is introduced is not new but is rather an extension of previously learned content. Coherence, the second key mathematical instructional shift, is built into the standards in that the mathematical standards form a complementary relationship to each other (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.b). The third mathematical instructional shift is increasing rigor. Rigor is defined in mathematics as a deeper, authentic grasp of mathematical concepts. When teaching the mathematical standards, educators must pursue conceptual understanding, procedural skills and fluency, and students’ ability to apply mathematical content to real-world situations (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.b).

Holding a critical role in the successful implementation of the CCSS is the classroom teacher. Without the teacher, educational initiatives are destined to have an unfulfilled impact. With this in mind, the next section of the literature review is centered on the salient role of the classroom teacher.

**Importance of the teacher.**

*Teacher influence on achievement.* The literature is rich with evidence that teachers have a direct impact on student learning through instruction and classroom environments (Cohen, Raudenbush, & Ball, 2003). According to Hattie (2003), when all of the factors that can affect student learning (internal and external) are considered, teachers account for approximately 30% of the variance in student learning. The importance of the classroom teacher’s impact on achievement was articulated by Leithwood, et al., (2004) in their pivotal study commissioned by the Wallace Foundation in which they stated,
In developing a starting point for this six-year study, we claimed, based on a preliminary review of research, that leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning. After six additional years of research, we are even more confident about this claim. (p. 9)

Teacher experience and education have an impact on student learning, albeit there is variance in the levels of significance with each factor. For example, teachers with more teaching experience and more education are more likely to be effective than teachers with less experience. In a study aimed at determining the effects of school, teacher, and family demographics on reading and mathematics achievement, Okpala, Smith, Jones, and Ellis (2000) established that the percentage of teachers with master’s degrees was positively linked to achievement changes in mathematics at a 1% significance level. Supovitz and Turner (2000) indicated that the level of teacher preparation specific to the teachers’ content level was strongly influential on their teaching practices. However, the same trend of statistical significance did not apply when studying the relationship between teachers with master’s degrees and reading achievement (Okpala et al., 2000). In the same study, Okpala et al. (2000) found that the percentage of teachers with 10 or more years of experience was correlated with mathematics achievement at a 1% significance level and 5% significance level for reading achievement.

Hattie (2003) examined the differences between expert and experienced teachers. Hattie’s preliminary research, which focused on the influence of teachers on student achievement in New Zealand schools, revealed that the largest effect size on achievement was teacher feedback that was provided to students on their work performance (1.13),
followed by the prior cognitive ability of the student (1.04) and then the instructional quality of the lessons (1.00). After a meta-analysis of research, Hattie asserted the claim that expert teachers were distinguished from experienced teachers due to their ability to excel in five overall dimensions pertaining to their teaching practices: (a) essential representations, (b) guiding learning, (c) monitoring and feedback, (d) affective attributes, and (e) influencing student outcomes. Additionally, Hattie investigated these claims in over 300 classrooms in the United States and concluded that when students were taught by expert teachers, they demonstrated an understanding of the instructional concepts in a manner that was “more integrated, more coherent and at a higher level of abstraction” (p. 15), when compared to the understanding of other students who were not instructed by expert teachers.

**Teacher influence on peer instructional practices.** Teacher leadership has been researched relative to the level of influence teachers have on their colleagues’ instructional practices. Leadership practices and the peer influence of teachers have been found to be positively correlated to teacher change in instruction (Supovitz et al., 2010). In addition, Supovitz et al. (2010) found that peer influence had a statistically significant impact on teachers’ instructional practices in ELA and mathematics, thereby providing the field with empirical evidence that teacher leadership influences on the instructional practices of teachers also impact student learning outcomes. Within the same study, Supovitz et al. concluded that while both the principal and teacher leaders were noted to influence instructional practices in ELA, peer influence was more powerful in prompting a change in teacher instruction in mathematics. Furthermore, mathematics teachers were two times more likely to be influenced by their peers than by principal leadership
combined with peer leadership (Supovitz et al., 2010), thereby indicating that teacher influence on peer practices may vary depending on the content area taught by the teacher.

Other research in the field has corroborated the influence of teacher leaders on peer instructional practices. Through their inquiry with beginning primary school science teachers, Appleton and Kindt (1999) found a link between collegial support and instructional practices. They concluded that peer support from experienced teachers gave beginning science teachers additional confidence to be risk takers in the classroom and to try various strategies (Appleton & Kindt, 1999). Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) also noted that peer reflective dialogue and shared norms and values strengthened teachers’ instructional practices. It can be concluded that teacher leaders hold an important role in promoting instructional changes among their peers.

**Importance of the principal.**

*Changes in the role of the principal.* The principal plays a significant role in the success of a school. It has been written, “Behind every great school is a great principal” (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, & Foleno, 2001, p. 7). Pivotal research that emerged during the 1990s indicated that the principal’s leadership at the site is a critical component in the overall effectiveness of a school (Glasman & Heck, 1992; Hallinger & Heck, 1996). In another seminal review of the evolution of the principalship spanning a 30-year window, Hallinger (1992) noted that between 1920 and the 1960s, principals were primarily administrative managers. According to Hallinger, it was acceptable for principals to maintain the status quo. In the 1950s, efficient management of the site was emphasized, and the need for principals to ensure teaching and learning began to develop (Breaux, 2012). During the 1960s and 1970s, Hallinger (1992) asserted that the responsibilities of
principals evolved to include managing programs, such as federally funded initiatives, along with monitoring compliance items, ensuring that special populations had their needs met, and encouraging curricular innovation. It was during this period of time that principals became known as change agents (Hallinger, 1992). Since the 1990s, the literature suggests that being an instructional leader has become a main responsibility of the school principal (Erway, 2006; Hallinger, 1992).

As a result of the increasing accountability, responsibilities, stresses, and demands placed on school principals, the role of the school principal has become multifaceted and complicated (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003). While principal accountability once included managing the school budget and developing relationships with teachers, being an instructional leader also emerged as an area of accountability (Lashway, 2003). Nowadays, principals shoulder the burden for running a well-managed school that provides a rigorous, accessible academic program for all students in which achievement levels are high. The increasing expectations that are placed on principals have been interpreted to be unrealistic (Cooley & Shen, 2003). Goodwin et al. (2003) suggested that due to the countless stresses and demands, a principal shortage was beginning to emerge.

Goodwin et al. (2003) confirmed the increasing complexity of the principalship due to societal and educational changes. While examining the changing responsibilities of the secondary principal in a two-stage study, the authors identified 45 descriptors pertaining to the principal’s changing role as the leader of the school and organized them into four overarching themes relating to principals’ perceptions of the increased requirements for their positions:
1. Principals experienced role conflict regarding their expected various leadership roles, such as being strategic, instructional, organizational, political, and community leaders.

2. Principals experienced accountability conflict between being inclusive and being accountable, along with meeting the challenging needs of students while meeting high standards of accountability.

3. Principals experienced autonomy conflict as they were pulled to be responsive to mandates while also needing to remain autonomous.

4. Principals experienced responsibility conflict in that they had increasing responsibilities, which prompted a greater need for clerical and professional support (Goodwin et al., 2003).

**Responsibilities of the modern-day principal.** Modern school principals are responsible for a broad array of duties. While principals once held the roles of primary disciplinarians and supervisors of teachers, modern-day principals must supervise certificated and classified personnel, manage budgets, coordinate strategic planning, provide instructional leadership, and ensure the learning of all students, including students with disabilities (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Lynch, 2012). According to Fullan (2014), principals must not only manage the school smoothly, but they are also expected to “manage health, safety, and the building; innovate without upsetting anyone; connect with students and teachers; be responsive to parents and the community; answer to their districts; and above all, deliver results” (p. 6). In other words, today’s principalship requires principals to lead in a manner that involves a certain level of skill and artistry (Townsend, 2009). According to Bogotch and Townsend (2008),
The “what” in this instance is the knowledge required to do the job well. It is “knowing” about curriculum, about management, about human relations and about various factors, both inside and outside the school, that are required to keep those within the school, students, teachers and others, safe and productive. However, it is only when this “knowing” and the “how” that school leadership is successful. The “how” in this instance is the set of processes used by the school leader to communicate, implement, evaluate and relate the knowledge base to those with whom the leader interacts, together with the attitudes and values that are shared by both leader and followers. We would argue that the practice of educational leadership is artistry, when these two factors come together in a way that promotes both simultaneously. (p. 3)

To articulate the intricacy surrounding the role of the school principal, Townsend (2009) wrote, “The real issue for school leaders is how to manage our schools, our staff, our resources, and our programs in a time of complex change” (p. 374). Townsend’s (2009) views reiterated the metaphors that Goodwin (2002) compiled by other researchers in the field:

- Administrator, Humanitarian, Program Manager, Problem Solver (Edinger & Murphy, 1995),
- Educator, Leader, Manager, Inner Person (Speck, 1995),
- Historian, Cheerleader, Lightning Rod, Landscaper, and Anthropologist (Feirsen, 1994),
• Building Managers, Personnel Administrators, Agents of Change, Boundary Spanners, Disciplinarians, Cheerleaders, and Instructional Leaders (Smith & Andrews, 1989). (p. 9)

Such responsibilities create a dynamic that makes the job of the school principal challenging on an easy day and downright discouraging on a challenging day. Fullan (2000) captured the essence of the overwhelming job of the principal:

The principal appears to have the worst of both worlds. The old world is still around with expectations to run a smooth school, and to be responsive to all; simultaneously the new world rains down on schools with disconnected demands, expecting that at the end of the day the school should be constantly showing better test results, and ideally become a learning organization. (p. 2)

As a result of standardized testing and rigorous accountability measures, principals are also responsible for increasing student achievement (Lineburg, 2010). Principals strive to achieve increased achievement as they influence and develop quality teaching and increased learning at their sites (Lineburg, 2010). This expectation is not likely to cease in the upcoming years, and increasing student performance and mastery of the CCSS will continue to be a top priority for school principals.

**Principal impact on achievement.** Increasing the academic achievement of students is at the forefront of the principal’s job. Increasing student learning is an expectation held of school principals, as emphasized by Elmore (2000), who asserted that principals should have the skills and knowledge to be able to diagnose and correct the deficits at their sites and lead the school to improved academic performance. Findings from the literature on student achievement indicate that the principal’s leadership is a
critical factor in moving a school toward increased levels of student learning (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Fullan, 2014; Sebring & Bryk, 2000; Young, Fuller, Brewer, Carpenter, & Mansfield, 2007). Moreover, Cotton (2003) concluded that principals had a “profound and positive influence on student learning” (p. 74). Through their meta-analysis of 70 leadership studies that investigated leadership practices and student achievement, Waters et al. (2003) indicated that there was an average effect size of .25 that was related to leadership and student achievement. However, this effect size pertained only to variables within the control of the school and did not account for outside influences such as family economic background, parents’ educational background, peer influences, and so forth. When all internal and external variables were taken into account, the effect size was considerably lower (Waters et al., 2003). Also noted in the research, however, is the assertion that elementary principals have a greater influence on achievement than secondary principals (Seashore Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010).

In the past 20 years, empirical research has been conducted on both the direct and the indirect impact of the school principal on student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Wahlstrom, 2008; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). An array of research supports the assumption that the school principal most likely impacts achievement through indirect leadership actions (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004; Supovitz et al., 2010; Witzers, Bosker, & Kruger, 2003). Fullan (2014) argued that “principals affect student learning indirectly but nonetheless explicitly” (p. 57). In describing the indirect influence of principals, Hattie (2003) posited that the principal’s effect on student learning is one that “trickles down” through other attributes as opposed
to being a direct influence on learning. For example, the leadership of the school principal has a direct impact on the attribute of school climate, which in turn has an indirect impact on student achievement (Hattie, 2003; Norton, 2002). In their investigation about what successful leadership looks like and how it works in schools, Leithwood et al. (2004) examined existing evidence regarding leadership practices and impact. As previously noted in the research by Waters et al. (2003), the sum of both direct and indirect leadership effects accounted for approximately one fourth of the total school effects on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004).

When studying the actions that effective principals take to influence and improve achievement, there are commonalities that emerge in the literature. Robinson (2011) indicated that principals impact achievement by creating clear goals and expectations, using resources strategically, confirming the quality of instruction, creating a safe and orderly learning environment, and most significantly, championing teacher learning and professional development. These findings confirmed the early research of Glasman and Heck (1992), who also studied the importance of the principal’s impact on achievement by examining the practices of effective principals whose schools had higher levels of achievement. Findings from the research of Glasman and Heck determined that effective principals maintained a focus on increasing student learning, created safe and secure learning environments, communicated high expectations for students and staff, and allocated resources.

Guided by a similar objective aimed at determining critical principal behavior most closely associated with student achievement, Cotton (2003) drew on the effective schools knowledge base documented by Edmonds (1979) and Brookover and Lezotte
Cotton (2003) also investigated the principal’s involvement with instruction, prompted by the research of Leithwood and Montgomery (1982), through an extensive literature review that included 81 reports composed of studies, reviews, and summaries focused on principal behaviors associated with student achievement. Spanning the K-12 spectrum, Cotton’s (2003) analysis included reports from teachers, students, and principals. Of the 26 behaviors most likely to have a positive impact on achievement, Cotton determined that these behaviors generally fit into five broad categories, which included having a focus on student learning, interactions and relationships, school culture, instruction, and accountability. Findings from other studies in the field revealed similar conclusions regarding the instructional leadership behaviors of principals that were associated with academic achievement. For example, Ovando and Ramirez (2007) suggested that principals’ instructional leadership actions in all levels of K-12 education included setting clear expectations, monitoring instruction through walk-through observations, and providing professional development opportunities according to teachers’ needs.

Principal leadership has also been researched in terms of being instructional or transformational. Transformational leadership occurs when leaders involve others in the pursuit of a common vision, foster an increased commitment to each member’s work, encourage a culture of risk taking and learning, and create processes for mutual decision making (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, La Pointe, & Orr, 2010). Instructional leadership, a concept that emerged during the effective schools movement in the 1980s, regarded the principal as the key educational expert (Marks & Printy, 2003). In 2003, Marks and Printy used hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) to conduct a multilevel study.
that examined how active collaboration could improve teaching quality and increase student achievement. HLM is an analytic method that is especially useful when seeking to understand relationships where hierarchies among variables may naturally occur, such as students nested within a classroom, classrooms nested with a school, and the varying degrees of influence on student achievement exerted by different school stakeholders (Sullivan, Dukes, & Losina, 1999). In their study, Marks and Printy (2003) analyzed the relationship between transformational and instructional leadership on pedagogical quality and student achievement. The researchers concluded that a complementary relationship with both foci was important for increasing student achievement (Marks & Printy, 2003). These findings were later validated by Seashore Louis et al. (2010) in their review of how leadership impacts achievement. Consequently, it can be postulated that principals must use both instructional and transformational leadership in order to influence increased achievement at their sites.

**Principal leadership and teacher instructional practices.** A metaphorical definition of instruction was described as “a stream, not an event, and it flows in and draws on environments—including other teachers and students, school leaders, parents, professions, local districts, state agencies, and test and text publishers” (Cohen et al., 2003, p. 122). Much of the research regarding the influence of principals on instruction has focused on the instructional leadership practices of the principal (May & Supovitz, 2011) and on the principal’s influence on student outcomes (Supovitz et al., 2010). In addition to studying the principal’s influence on achievement, researchers have also posed the question as to if and how principals influence the instructional practices of teachers (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). Supovitz et al. (2010) identified crucial principal
practices needed to influence instructional change practices, such as communicating mission and goals, building community and trust, and maintaining an instructional focus. Findings from other studies (Cotton, 2003; Glasman & Heck, 1992; Robinson et al., 2008) revealed that establishing goals and expectations; resourcing strategically; planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum; promoting and participating in teacher learning and development; and ensuring an orderly and supportive environment were vital principal practices that were influential in changes in teacher instruction.

Serving as a theory of influence pertaining to changes in high school teachers’ instructional practices, Lineburg (2010) identified five primary principal influence strategies embedded in research: (a) communicating goals (Blase & Roberts, 1994), (b) supervising instruction (Blase & Blase, 1998), (c) promoting professional development (Blase & Blase, 1998), (d) providing resources (Appleton & Kindt, 1999), and (e) providing incentives (Sheppard, 1996). The efficacy of these strategies was explored in Lineburg’s (2010) research. Lineburg found that teachers were more likely to change their instructional practices as a result of pressure influence, which included directives from the principal, rather than as a result of the five primary influence strategies listed above. Conversely, Seashore Louis et al. (2010) suggested that in secondary schools, increased pressure might not improve the school climate for achievement. This might indicate that the same limitations could be true of pressure directives regarding instructional practices, thereby highlighting an area for future research. It is also important to note that Lineburg’s (2010) findings stemmed from quantitative and qualitative data collected at the high school level, thereby requiring
caution when making inferences to leadership influence on instructional changes at the elementary or middle school level.

Seashore Louis et al. (2010) explored the impact of shared leadership between principals and teachers, the development of trust relationships among professionals, and the provision of support for instructional improvement. The authors found that principals had a stronger effect in creating collaborative conditions for teachers to work together than they did on changing instruction (Seashore Louis et al., 2010). The authors also found that shared leadership had a strong but indirect effect on instruction through professional collaborations that prompted teacher leadership and improvement. Furthermore, Seashore Louis et al. discovered that the emotional and professional bond that existed between teachers and the principal, labeled as trust, had a limited influence on changing instructional practices when compared with other leadership behaviors. The unique characteristics of the school, designated as building-level factors, had no effect on instructional practices (Seashore Louis et al., 2010).

Providing professional development is one way that principals attempt to influence teacher instructional practices (Blase & Blase, 1998). For example, Supovitz and Turner (2000) conducted a study that investigated change in middle school teacher instructional practices specific to science reform. The authors concluded that the amount of professional development that teachers received was powerfully associated with an increase in inquiry-based teaching practice and investigative classroom culture (Supovitz & Turner, 2000). Three primary goals when providing professional development included influencing “change in the classroom practices of teachers, change in their attitudes and beliefs, and change in the learning outcomes of students” (Guskey, 2002,
p. 383). With this in mind, principals hold the responsibility for ensuring that their teachers receive information, training, and direction as to how instructional approaches should be changed or improved (Desimone, Smith, & Ueno, 2006). Likewise, Elmore (2000) reinforced the necessity of providing “highly targeted professional development for teachers” (p. 28). Principals also support teachers with professional development by aligning activities with consideration being given to the teacher and student weaknesses in the schools (Breaux, 2012). When principals plan for professional development at their sites, it is important to consider the age ranges of the students that they serve.

From the research of Seashore Louis et al. (2010), combined with additional research regarding the principal’s role in influencing instruction (Cotton, 2003; Marks & Nance, 2007; Supovitz et al., 2010), a clear argument emerges that shared leadership and promoting a collaborative culture between teachers are necessary factors for influencing teacher changes in instructional practices. This argument was supported by Supovitz and Turner (2000), who established that the level of principal supportiveness had a positive influence on teacher practices, although this influence was not as significant as the school’s socioeconomic status. While Supovitz et al. (2010) believed that principal leadership did have an indirect influence on student learning through teachers’ instructional practices, they also believed that principals had an indirect influence on instruction by creating cultures of collaboration and communication that fostered teachers’ learning from each other. Comparably, Marks and Nance (2007) indicated that principals’ influence in both supervisory and instructional roles had a complementary relationship when combined with teachers’ active participation in decision making, suggesting the benefits of shared leadership.
Since the objective of this study was to research how principals made sense of the CCSS and how they engaged in sensemaking to determine how to facilitate the alignment of teacher practices to meet the demands of the CCSS, the synthesis of research described in this literature review included a repetition of many of the leadership elements recommended by Eilers and D’Amico (2012) that are relevant to principals as they embark on the sensemaking process required by the new standards. The six elements identified by Eilers and D’Amico regarding principal influence on instruction require that principals (a) establish a purpose that includes familiarization with resources needed to implement the standards and obtain early input from staff regarding the established purpose; (b) align faculty by reorganizing teams to capitalize on strengths, provide professional development, and identify crucial collegial support for hesitant faculty members; (c) determine priorities by prioritizing key steps needed for the implementation process; (d) facilitate professional conversations by building learning communities in which questions are asked and answers are sought collaboratively; (e) encourage risk taking so that all staff members feel safe in trying new practices; and (f) provide specific feedback to communicate what is working and provide assistance in making necessary changes and doing so in a manner that alleviates fear of consequences.

Sensemaking. Much has been written about how organizations and individuals make sense of the current reality of the world when it is “perceived to be different from the expected state of the world” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). Stemming from Weick’s (1990) early work on organizing in the social-psychological realm along with his foundational analysis of the Tenerife plane crash (Weick, 1990) and the Mann Gulch fires (Weick, 1993), Weick’s theory of sensemaking emerged. Weick’s (1995) original
research was focused on providing explanations for how people in organizations made sense of their environments and examined the social and psychological processes of organizing events in order to create meaning. Hence, sensemaking is concerned with how individuals and organizations assign meaning to specific events (Mills et al., 2010; Weick et al., 2005). According to Weick et al. (2005), “Sensemaking involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action” (p. 409). Mills et al. (2010) posited that the need for individuals to engage in the process of sensemaking is triggered when there is a change in routines, distress, or when an organizational crisis occurs. Drawing on the work of Levitt and March (1988) and Weick (1995), O’Meara, Lounder, and Campbell (2014) articulated that sensemaking assumes that people create meaning from bits of ambiguous information and that individuals will interpret information based on multiple factors including “their own identities, perceptions of the plausible and legitimate, and routines of thought” (p. 605).

The process of sensemaking may also occur on an individual basis or as part of a social activity (Weick, 1995). As summarized by Janger (2006), “Sensemaking adds borrowings from sources such as social psychology, organization theory, organizational behavior, systems theory, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism. The perspective endeavors to bridge individual and collective levels of analysis and to link issues of meaning, action, and interaction” (p. 27).

Sensemaking is also a fundamental component of effective leadership. Ancona (2012) described sensemaking as an essential capability needed by leaders for a complex and ever-changing world in which there is “an articulation of the unknown, because,
sometimes trying to explain the unknown is the only way to know how much you understand it” (p. 4). Further underscoring the need for leaders to be effective at sensemaking, Ancona stated that leaders must also possess “emotional intelligence, self-awareness, the ability to deal with cognitive complexity, and the flexibility to go between the ‘what is’ of sensemaking and the ‘what can be’ of visioning” (p. 5). Adding credence to this line of thought, researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) School of Management referred to four essential capabilities required for effective leadership, including relating, visioning, inventing, and sensemaking (Ancona, Malone, Orlikowski, & Senge, 2007). Of these four critical leadership skills, Ancona (2012) maintained that the least understood by leaders is sensemaking:

- **Relating** is about building trusting relationships among people and across networks, **visioning** involves painting a compelling picture of the future and what is possible, and **inventing** means creating the structures and processes needed to move toward the vision, [but] most scratch their heads at the term sensemaking. And yet our 360-degree survey data reveal that sensemaking is highly correlated with leadership effectiveness—even more than visioning. (p. 5)

Sensemaking also occurs during the process of school reform. During times of reform, leaders experience the “throw-ness, unknowability, and unpredictability that makes having some direction, any direction, the central issue for human beings, and by implication, the central issue for leaders” (Weick, 2009, p. 264). Morante-Brock (2014) maintained that as “principals provide the scaffold between the concept of the new initiatives and the actual implementation” (p. 116), principals are experiencing the uncertainty of what the standards mean and what process they should use to align
instruction to the rigor of the standards. There is a great deal of value to be placed on the uncertainties that the reform process prompts, one in which the process of sensemaking is as important as the outcome. Weick (2009) reiterated that it is more critical for leaders to be able to engage in sensemaking during times of change in order to understand who and where they are in the context of change, along with understanding what and why they are taking specific actions. With this in mind, having a specific destination is not as compelling as the need for the leader to effectively “set in motion a process for direction making” (Weick, 2009, p. 265). According to Janger (2006),

When school reform models are enacted by local school people, they do not only transform or adapt a given model. Sensemaking theory, and evidence from past reform models, indicates that reformers discover, in retrospect, their own model in the actions of the schools. A sensemaking perspective depicts the model not as a technical, rational plan, but as an emerging understanding, one whose more complete features will be realized in action. (p. 31)

Weick et al. (2005) asserted that there were “distinctive features” (p. 410) of sensemaking that included eight pivotal premises: (a) Sensemaking establishes flux as it begins with chaos, (b) sensemaking begins first by noticing and then by bracketing, (c) sensemaking is about labeling, (d) sensemaking is retrospective, (e) sensemaking is concerned with presumption, (f) sensemaking is social in nature as well as systematic, (g) sensemaking pertains to action, and (h) sensemaking organizes through communication.

**Sensemaking establishes flux as it begins with chaos.** One’s sensemaking does not begin from nothing, “but like all organizing occurs amidst a stream of potential
antecedents and consequences” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 411). Using the metaphor of the compass versus the map, Weick (2009) asserted that during uncertain times, the compass is a more useful tool in providing direction than a map that pinpoints a specific destination. Therefore, leaders who begin with the assertion that they do not know the destination are more likely to ask the right questions, accept their own ignorance when dealing with chaos, and stay in touch with the current context (Weick, 2009). The combination of events might or might not cause leaders to glean specific clues that require greater attention (Weick et al., 2005). Weick et al. (2005) suggested,

When people then ask “now what should I do?” this added question has the force of bringing meaning into existence, meaning that they hope is stable enough for them to act into the future, continue to act, and to have the sense that they remain in touch with the continuing flow of experience. (p. 410)

**Sensemaking begins first by noticing and then by bracketing.** This secondary stage of sensemaking occurs when a mental model that provides a framework for recognizing and guiding responses is assigned (Weick et al., 2005). Leaders begin to notice signs that are at variance with those that are considered to be typical (Weick et al., 2005). According to Chia (2003), phenomena are derived out of one’s experiences and are then conceptually oriented and labeled in order to allow for communication. Bracketing occurs when the noticing is then conceptualized and labeled, thereby providing a structure for establishing meaning (Weick, 2009). As bracketing occurs, simplification follows (Weick et al., 2005).

**Sensemaking is about labeling.** Weick et al. (2005) referred to labeling as “functional deployment” (p. 411). When vocabulary is associated with organizing,
labeling occurs. By associating labels for mutually dependent events, possible ways to manage, coordinate, or distribute action in order to find common ground are identified (Weick et al., 2005). The process of labeling assists with the conceptualization of categories in which it becomes easier to “see” what is going on, as Weick (2009) described:

In order to see something, we need concepts. Perception without conception is blind. But concepts, abstractions, and schemas with perception are empty. Believing is seeing except that seeing is forgetting the name of the thing seen. To manage this tension we need observing that is more mindful, concepts that are more refined, and constraints or sharing that are less tight. (p. 34)

Sensemaking is retrospective. Action and process are inexplicably related. It can be argued that people take actions in order to make sense, therein producing a circular loop in which sensemaking becomes an outcome of the actions by which future actions are then informed, and so on (Weick, 2009). Weick et al. (2005) elucidated the retrospective nature of the sensemaking process by describing an application relevant to the field of nursing. When working with a patient and observing patterns, the need exists for the nurse to know what is medically normal in order to identify what is wrong with the patient as part of the process of making a medical diagnosis. In this process, actions may become mistakes, which provide yet another avenue for learning and inform the leader with lessons learned from hindsight (Weick, 2009). Likewise, as actors bracket circumstances and assign labels to the phenomenon, the labeling will not truly capture what is really going on, as the sensemaking process in which diagnoses and mistakes are realized happens after the event, not prior to the event (Weick et al., 2005).
**Sensemaking is concerned with presumption.** Presumptions are guesses or suspicions about a particular topic or issue. Making presumptions is useful in the sensemaking process, as the presumptions made by individuals serve as guides to subsequent actions (Weick et al., 2005). Although sensemaking might be viewed as a cerebral, passive process, it is guided in part by the presumptions that are initially developed, therein originating with “immediate actions, local context and concrete cues” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412). The act of presumption is put into motion when an actor (leader) develops a hunch that is tested through “progressive approximations” in an effort to determine the most suitable response (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412).

**Sensemaking is social in nature as well as systematic.** The importance of the social and systematic aspects of sensemaking is critical. As one’s “bracketed set of noticings” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 413) emerge, the social context of figuring things out happens through conversations and actions. In this instance, sensemaking moves from being an individual process to one that is collective, occurring on behalf of the organization (Weick et al., 2005). For example, principals who are engaged in sensemaking of the CCSS rely in part on “macro-actors” (Weick, 2009, p. 5) that include governors and district leaders to voice a plan or interpretation of what to do next regarding the implementation of the CCSS (Grossman et al., 2011; Marks & Nance, 2007).

Although his article was written before the emergence of the CCSS, Spillane (2000) emphasized the social nature of sensemaking by describing the importance of district leadership in explaining policy interpretation, in that “district leaders’ schemes for understanding instruction and its improvement enable them to place new knowledge into
some framework for interpretation, a critical component of sense-making” (pp. 166-167). Weick et al. (2005) reiterated that through a social and interactive process, implied knowledge becomes applicable to the situation at hand. Furthermore, Weick (2009) asserted,

The resulting network of multiple, overlapping, loosely connected conversations, spread across time and distance, collectively preserves patterns of understanding that are more complicated than any one node can reproduce. The distributed organization does not know what it knows until macro-actors articulate it. This ongoing articulation gives voice to the collectivity and enables interconnected conversation and conversationalists to see what they have said, to understand what it might mean, and to learn who they might be. (p. 5)

Sensemaking pertains to action. Two important questions guide the sensemaking process, with the first question asking about what is going on and the second question asking what needs to be done (Weick et al., 2005). Action is a fundamental component to sensemaking, as “in sensemaking, action and talk are treated as cycles rather than as a linear sequence. Talk occurs both early and late, as does action, and either one can be designated as the ‘starting point to the destination’” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412). When individuals interpret their knowledge of new situations or changes with frameworks that have previously been trusted, while still not holding complete confidence in such frameworks, individuals will then test new frameworks and the resulting interpretations (Weick et al., 2005). In other words, momentary truths change, evolve, and take shape with time (Weick et al., 2005).
As the continuance of change emerges, the effective leader remains in motion and fosters improvisation and risk taking during the process of sensemaking (Weick, 2009). A leader should not be stagnant until he or she makes a decision, but rather an effective leader should “stay in motion, have a direction, look closely, update often, and converse candidly” (Weick, 2009, p. 266). Again drawing on the usefulness of the compass, leadership efforts are better viewed through the lens of sensemaking rather than decision making, therein reducing the need to get the decision exactly correct but rather emphasizing the need to create the story by discovering (Weick, 2009).

**Sensemaking organizes through communication.** In sensemaking, the act of communication is vital (Weick et al., 2005). Through conversations, meanings develop since “sensemaking is, importantly, an issue of language, talk, and communication” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 409). As individuals communicate collectively, they are able to learn from each other, thereby making sense of the ways that others make sense of changes (Mills et al., 2010). This is particularly true in today’s educational context, as teachers and principals engage in conversations and discourse about the implications of the CCSS. Summing up the importance of communication as part of the sensemaking process, Taylor and Van Every (2000) described communication as an ongoing process of making sense of the circumstances in which people collectively find ourselves and of the events that affect them. The sensemaking, to the extent that it involves communication, takes place in interactive talk and draws on the resources of language in order to formulate an exchange through talk. (p. 413)
Summary

As American educators begin to implement the new set of national standards, this nation will once again turn to school principals, who are expected to “lead the way” (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003, p. 43). Today’s school principal is faced not only with meeting the changing job demands linked to this increasingly complex society but also with the charge of ensuring that teachers implement the instructional shifts needed for the CCSS so that all students learn. Fullan (2014) indicated that the CCSS will make the tension of the principal role “unbearable because so much more will be expected of schools and principals” (p. 6). Teachers, as well, will be tasked with implementing a new set of standards without having deep knowledge of what and how the standards should be implemented.

This review of literature has demonstrated that while the rigor of the standards has been thoroughly investigated by researchers (Carmichael et al., 2010; Kober & Rentner, 2012), little attention has been spent preparing principals to facilitate teacher changes in practices to meet the demands of the CCSS. A review of databases on the topic of implementing the CCSS revealed little scholarly research regarding administrator preparation for the CCSS or how principals were preparing their schools for the new standards. This gap in research further attests to the timeliness and importance of this study.

With the CCSS an arm’s length away from full implementation, the need for principals to identify effective teaching approaches and be able to influence teachers to make instructional changes has now reached an urgent level. School principals find themselves one step behind district leadership in planning for preparation. However, the
literature is clear in identifying the influential actions school leaders should take to positively impact achievement and instruction. It is the research base described in this literature review on which this current study was grounded.

The fundamental importance of further exploring the principal’s influence on teacher changes in instructional practices was well-articulated by Hattie (2003):

“Teachers can and usually do have positive effects, but they must have exceptional effects. We need to direct attention at higher quality teaching, and higher expectations that students can meet appropriate challenges” (p. 3). Principals stand at the crossroads in one of the most critical instructional shifts in this nation’s history. How principals respond to the challenge of making sense not only of the CCSS but also of their necessary leadership actions in order to align teacher practices to the rigor of the CCSS formed the compelling underpinning for this research.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The objective of this narrative study was to understand the experiences of school principals as they made sense of the CCSS. As such, the researcher captured the unique experiences of school principals who were early implementers of the CCSS in order to gain an in-depth understanding of how they made sense of the instructional implications of the CCSS and how they used their understanding to facilitate the implementation of the CCSS. This study used qualitative methods, which were useful when seeking to explore and understand this specific phenomenon (Creswell, 2008).

The use of narrative inquiry as a research design allows researchers to gather data through a process of collecting stories, reporting on the unique experiences of individuals, and discussing the meaning of these experiences with each individual (Creswell, 2008). Using this qualitative method with three principals, this study allowed for the retelling of each principal’s “personal experience story” (Creswell, 2008, p. 514). When interview data were combined with field notes and artifacts, the researcher was able to shed light on how principals have understood the CCSS mandates and articulate how they used these understandings to facilitate necessary changes in teachers’ practices. Through semistructured interviews, the principal participants reflected on their own experiences with initial CCSS implementation; explored their feelings, struggles, and success as they made sense of the CCSS; and examined their own stories about their leadership decision making when facilitating the implementation of the CCSS.

Overview of the Study

Research has clearly demonstrated the importance of the principal’s leadership. Numerous studies have found a link between the principal and student achievement
(Gentilucci & Muto, 2007; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Within the research, evidence suggests that principals not only influence student learning but also impact the quality of instruction (Supovitz et al., 2010). In light of the weight of their leadership roles, principals not only set the tone for the quality of instruction, but they also influence teacher adherence to specific curriculum.

With the mandated full implementation of the CCSS in 2014-2015, principals hold the responsibility for equipping, preparing, and requiring teachers to make necessary changes in their instructional practices in order to align practices to the CCSS (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012). As the intent of the CCSS is to ensure that all students, regardless of where they live, the school they attend, or their level of income, receive the same high-quality, rigorous curriculum (Porter et al., 2011), principals must lead this instructionally related charge at their respective sites in order to ensure that all students learn. However, before principals can determine what changes must be made in instruction, they must first understand the CCSS (Clifford & Mason, 2013; Killion, 2012). This is problematic as emerging research has suggested that principals have indicated that they have been provided with inadequate professional development on the CCSS (McLaughlin, Glaab, & Carrasco, 2014).

There is much that principals must know and be able to do in order to be effective leaders during this time of unprecedented change that accompanies the full implementation of the CCSS. Paramount to leading their teachers through the implementation of the CCSS, principals must understand what the learning and teaching goals are that relate to the standards (McLaughlin et al., 2014). Also of utmost importance, principals must understand how instruction must change in order to meet the
demands of the standards (Brown & Vargo, 2014). Likewise, principals must recognize how to facilitate the change process in order to ensure that students become college and career ready (Killion, 2012). Another top priority is that principals must grasp the type of professional development their teachers need in order to teach the standards (McLaughlin et al., 2014). Along with these challenges, local actors, including principals, have been faced with determining the instructional resources and curriculum that will meet the demands of the CCSS (McLaughlin et al., 2014).

The need for principals to make sense of the standards is urgent in that the instructional practices that teachers use to provide CCSS-aligned instruction may differ from the manner in which teachers have been providing instruction during the era of NCLB. The CCSS change how students must learn and how teachers must teach (Learning Sciences Marzano Center, 2014; McLaughlin et al., 2014). These new standards require students to become critical thinkers, active problem solvers, and effective communicators (Peery, 2013). The 43 states that have adopted the CCSS have done so in an effort to more fully prepare students to be college and career ready.

The stories and data that were gathered from participants may be useful in informing the greater body of school principals about how school leaders understood these new standards and used their understanding to facilitate necessary changes. Since the CCSS call for a new approach to teaching and learning, this study may serve as a catalyst to further examine the needs experienced by principals who were early implementers of the CCSS as they sought to understand the standards. Moreover, this study examined how these principals used their understanding of the CCSS to guide their teachers in implementing instructional changes in practices.
These findings contribute new knowledge to the field of education. It is the researcher’s hope that readers will be able to engage in the narrative reflections of the participants as they read each participant’s story, recognizing the common threads and elements that the researcher highlighted and explored. Through the readers’ involvement in the storied experiences of the principals, readers who are also principals may be able to connect their own experiences to those of the principals whose stories have been captured in this study. The information that was obtained through the study was continually and collaboratively examined for accuracy with the participants.

**Narrative Inquiry Research Design**

This study employed a narrative inquiry research design that is within the broad spectrum of qualitative research. According to Creswell (2008), qualitative research is an “inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon” (p. 645). Qualitative research is conducted when researchers seek to “understand the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13). Within the realm of qualitative research, Merriam (2009) identified basic types of qualitative research, including phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative analysis, critical research, and case studies, as common research designs. Likewise, Creswell (2008) described five approaches used in qualitative research: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. According to Creswell, these five approaches to inquiry-driven research “differ in the diversity of information collected, the unit of study being examined, the extent of field issues discussed in the literature, and the intrusiveness of the data collection effort” (p. 177).
Prior to selecting the narrative research design for this study, the researcher considered the additional dimensional attributes of qualitative research types described by Merriam (2009):

A phenomenological study is interested in the essence or underlying structure of a phenomenon; ethnography focuses on a sociocultural interpretation; grounded theory strives to build a substantive theory, one “grounded” in the data collected; narrative analysis uses people’s stories to understand experience; and critical research seeks to uncover oppression and empower. (p. 37)

The researcher also reflected on the objective of the study, which was to capture the unique experiences of school principals regarding how they made sense of the CCSS and how they used their understanding to facilitate the implementation of the CCSS at their sites. Creswell (2008) posited that a researcher might choose to use the narrative inquiry design when he or she wants to “capture an everyday, normal form of data that is familiar to individuals” (p. 512). Likewise, Creswell indicated that narrative researchers are “most interested in exploring the experiences” of individuals (p. 517). Furthermore, Polkinghorne (2010) asserted that narrative thinking is used to inform future practices. Through narrative thinking, the researcher was able to analyze how events and prior actions led to outcomes and also “construct imagined scenarios about what effect different actions might have in regard to a goal” (Polkinghorne, 2010, p. 396).

Since the researcher was interested in providing insight to other educators to inform future practices regarding the implementation of the CCSS and was intent on gathering data in order to describe individual experiences related to the CCSS, these two primary reasons justified the use of narrative research as the research design for this
study. Additional reasons for the selection of the narrative research design were exemplified through the researcher’s further investigation of methodological approaches. It was important to the researcher to be able to tell each participant’s story. Because narrative research allows researchers to focus on a “microanalytic picture” of individual stories (Creswell, 2008, p. 512) and is “the study of how humans make meaning of experience by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that both refigure the past and create purpose in the future” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 245), this approach supported the researcher’s quest to understand the experiences of the participating principals. The use of narrative research provided the forum for the researcher to discuss what the experiences meant to the participating individuals in the study (Creswell, 2008).

Moreover, in narrative thinking, the importance of temporality as a central feature is reiterated in that all events and people proceed through the process of change (Clandinin & Connelly, 1998). When examining a phenomenon through an educational perspective, “it is important to be able to narrate the person in terms of the process” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 30). By providing a platform in which the storied experiences of principals who have worked through the process of understanding the CCSS and the related instructional implications of the CCSS could be told, the reader was also able to simultaneously engage in and gain insights from each participant’s shared experience.
Research Questions

Creswell (2008) stated that research questions in qualitative research are “open-ended, general questions that the researcher would like answered during the study” (p. 645). The following research questions were therefore explored in this study:

Overarching Question: How have school principals made sense of the instructional implications of the CCSS standards?

1. How did the process of sensemaking guide school principals in their leadership decision making when facilitating the alignment of teacher practices to meet the instructional demands of the CCSS?

2. What types of leadership decisions did school principals make, and why did they make these decisions when facilitating the alignment of teacher practices to meet the demands of the CCSS?

Participants

Within the context of the narrative research design, “the participants are the architects of the story, putting the building blocks of experiences together” (Bailey, 2013, p. 73). The participants in this study included three principals from a California school district that moved forward with full implementation of the CCSS prior to 2014-2015. Participants were selected using purposeful sampling, which is a sampling procedure used by researchers who are intentional about the selection of individuals in order to explore the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2008).

In an effort to be deliberate about the selection of school principals for this study, purposeful sampling was used in which the researcher identified school districts that were considered to be early implementers of the CCSS. Districts considered to be early
implementers of the CCSS were those that designed a plan for the rollout of the standards starting in 2011-2012 (Brown & Vargo, 2014). As part of the purposeful sampling process, the identification trail included first reviewing a list of possible school districts for participation using Brown and Vargo’s (2014) report that described lessons learned from school districts that were early implementers of the CCSS. Given time constraints in the researcher’s schedule along with possible costs for transportation, the school districts included in Brown and Vargo’s report that were located within a 60-mile radius of the researcher’s home were selected as preferable candidates for participation. Additional criteria for selection included districts that served K-12 students, as opposed to school districts that served only elementary or high school students. These purposeful criteria led the researcher to District A as the district of choice for this study.

Following the anticipated selection of District A, the researcher arranged an appointment with the assistant superintendent, who also supervised principals. At this time, the researcher was able to draw on the expertise of a district-level administrator who had firsthand knowledge of principal effectiveness in terms of early implementation of the CCSS. The assistant superintendent recommended four principals for participation in the study, but only three principals were ultimately able to participate. At this initial meeting with the district administrator, the researcher provided the assistant superintendent with a set of written criteria to consider prior to recommending principals for consideration in the study. The recommendations made by the assistant superintendent were based on which principals were considered to be most successful in early implementation of the CCSS at their sites. Recommended principals who met the criteria established in the study were all principals at the elementary school level.
For the purpose of this study, the researcher identified three principals within the same school district, although the demographics, sizes of schools, and levels of school performance based on levels of implementation of the CCSS varied. Additional criteria such as each principal’s length of time at the school site and convenience factors such as a willingness to meet over a series of appointments were considered. It was the researcher’s intent to obtain multiple perspectives on CCSS implementation and learn from the experiences of the principals through the telling of their stories. Given that principals were selected from multiple school sites, the participants brought a rich array of experiences, perspectives, and stories that shed light on how principals who were early implementers made sense of the new standards and used their knowledge to facilitate necessary changes in teacher practices.

The researcher contacted the potential participants first electronically to determine interest in voluntary participation in the study. After exchanging several e-mails with each participant, the researcher scheduled the interviews. During the individual meetings with the principals, the researcher provided them with an overview of the study, answered any questions that the participants had, and reviewed the process for voluntary participation in the study. Once the principals had signed the written informed consent form required by the California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, Institutional Review Board (IRB), the researcher engaged the participants in the interview process.

Setting

The setting for this study was a school district in California, with the pseudonym of District A. This school district serves approximately 53,000 students on an annual basis. Located within 45 miles of Los Angeles, the unified school district is one of the
largest school districts in the state. With such a sizeable student population, there are over 30 elementary schools, eight intermediate/middle schools, five comprehensive high schools, one middle college high school, and three alternative education schools. Due to the criteria established in the study, the specific school sites selected for this study only included elementary school principals. Demographic data for the district indicated that 52% of the students were Hispanic, 29% were Caucasian, 8% were Asian, 6% were African American, and 5% were other races. Within the district, approximately 43% of the students received free/reduced meals, and 13% of the students were ELs.

**Role of the Researcher**

In narrative research, the researcher must accurately capture the stories of individual participants and bring them to life. Metaphorically, the researcher was creating a final artifact, just as a pottery artist works with a lump of clay in order to shape it into its final form. The researcher gathered the supplies (stories) before softening, smoothing, molding, sculpting, and refining the clay in order to present the completed artifact. As the key instrument for collecting and analyzing the stories, the researcher worked to expand her “understanding through nonverbal as well as verbal communication, process information (data) immediately, clarify and summarize material, check with respondents for accuracy of interpretation, and explore unusual or unanticipated responses” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15). It was therefore essential that the researcher understood the central phenomenon from the perspectives of the participants (Merriam, 2009). Here, the priority was to maximize the researcher’s understanding of the lived stories of participants, made possible by the researcher taking the stance of “observer as participant” (Merriam, 2009, p. 124). Although the researcher was “in the
midst—located somewhere along the dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63), the researcher’s single most important priority was to be the “information gatherer” (Merriam, 2009, p. 124).

With this in mind, the researcher was engaged in observing and interacting with participants without becoming a core member of the group (Merriam, 2009). Nevertheless, in order to foster a climate of trust, the researcher communicated an openness to accept the “felt meanings” of the participants without making judgments (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 481). Reiterating this point, Polkinghorne (2007) expressed that “focused listening and exploration can bring to the fore more of the intricate multiplicity of an experienced meaning” (p. 481). Over time, the researcher underwent change as experiences within and outside of the inquiry space were modified (Polkinghorne, 2010).

As the researcher narrated the lived experiences of the participants, she engaged in ongoing communication with participants via e-mail and telephone conversations in order to seek feedback, receive clarification, and ensure accuracy of the written stories. All writing was shared with participants on a “work-in-progress basis” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 60) and prior to final publication and submission. To reduce bias and prevent the researcher’s own experiences and opinions from being integrated into the stories of the participants, the researcher maintained personal notes that assisted in bracketing her own story (Willis, 2004). Throughout the entire process, the researcher engaged in “wakefulness” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 184). This wakefulness required the researcher to be reflective and thoughtful, constantly attentive to all inquiry decisions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It was important that the researcher did not intentionally or unintentionally influence the subjects and, in so doing, alter perceptions
or renditions of past events. Through the art of crafting an elegant yet accurate storyline, the researcher paid skillful attention to this type of subtle influence.

During this study, the researcher was responsible for handling all procedural elements that arose throughout the course of the investigation. The researcher completed the necessary steps by obtaining clearance to begin the research by first obtaining IRB permission. Following the selection process already described, predetermined criteria were used to select participants. It was the researcher’s role to inform participants of the conditions of the study and to ensure that all participants voluntarily consented to participate in the study. As an observing participant, the researcher facilitated the interviews and discussions that occurred while maintaining careful records. Since the researcher was a principal at a school that was not an early implementer of the CCSS, the researcher’s story was not nested within the stories of the participants or included within the five chapters of the dissertation.

Data Collection

A critical outcome of this study was for the researcher to craft stories (Polkinghorne, 1995) that described the participants’ experiences with the CCSS. Considering that “narrative inquiry is a relational inquiry as we work in the field, move from field to field text, and from field text to research text” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 60), the researcher made sense of the collected records, interviews, and data. Within this study, the term data referred to narrative interviews of the participants, along with the researcher’s field notes and collection of documents.

Interviews. Interviews are a frequent method used by researchers to create field texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The interviews in this study were semistructured
Semistructured interviews include questions that are flexibly used (Merriam, 2009). The researcher guided the participants in creating annals and chronicles as part of the interview process that was focused on obtaining the oral history of each participant’s story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Prior to beginning the interviews with participants, the researcher piloted the interview questions by conducting a pilot study with two participants external to the investigation. The intent of the questions was to investigate how principals figured out the instructional implications of the CCSS and how they used this knowledge in their decision making pertaining to their leadership actions. Therefore, the questions were designed to explore the struggles and successes principals experienced through this process of sensemaking, along with how they thought about the instructional shifts needed at their sites. In addition, the researcher asked questions that explored the types of conversations that the principals had to increase their understanding of the CCSS, the leadership actions taken by the principals in order to promote instruction congruent to the CCSS, and how the principals determined if their actions were effective in achieving the desired instructional changes. As part of the pilot study, the researcher took notes and considered the responses of the pilot participants. Based on these responses, the researcher determined how the interview questions needed to be modified in order to better align to the research questions. During the pilot interviews, the researcher also sought feedback on the questions and made changes to improve the questions based on this feedback.

Following the piloting and the revision of the interview questions, the interviews with the official study participants commenced. During the interviews, the conversations...
were recorded with two digital recording devices while the researcher concurrently took field notes. Upon review of the interviews, the researcher listened repeatedly to the recordings, made additional notes, reflected back on the conditions under which the interviews occurred, and considered other dynamics of the interviews in order to fully capture the lived experiences of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These steps were essential in that the fluidity of inquiry situations changed over time as outside influences were altered, multiple decisions were made to facilitate the achievement of the goal, and participants varied in their responses to the researcher (Polkinghorne, 2010).

When meeting with the participants, the locations for the interviews were determined by mutual collaboration between each participant and the researcher, and the researcher communicated a sense of flexibility when selecting locations for the interviews. Two of the interviews occurred in the offices of the principals, while the third principal requested that the interview occur at her home. A total of three interviews were conducted, one with each participant. The interviews lasted between 1.5 and 2.5 hours and were followed up by extensive exchanges of communication.

**Field texts.** Creswell (2008) indicated that field texts “represent information from different sources collected by researchers in a narrative design” (p. 640). Within narrative inquiry, *field text* is often used instead of the term data, since field texts are created through the participants’ stories rather than being “found or discovered” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 92). Therefore, field texts included the written form of the participants’ stories.

As the study unfolded, the researcher took field notes. In qualitative research, field notes are text recorded by the researcher during the process of observation
The notes from observations described “intense and targeted observation of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam, 2009, p. 268). This also included pictures of the office bulletin boards; visible displays of CCSS information at the school sites; and notes about the context, people, or activities at the sites (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, the researcher’s annotations were included in the field notes. These annotations included questions, reflections, and personal observations generated by the researcher. These notes assisted the researcher in filling “in the richness, nuance, and intricacy of the lived stories and the landscape” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 80).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) advised that field texts must be “kept and continually referenced by narrative inquirers” (p. 86).

**Documents.** The use of personal documents that principals shared to help them tell their stories added to the collection of data. Documents consist of both private and personal records used by qualitative researchers to obtain information about participants or a site (Creswell, 2008). The term document was used by Merriam (2009) to include “a wide range of written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study at hand” (p. 139). As such, artifacts fit into the broad category of documents. Artifacts were defined by Merriam as “‘things’ or objects in the environment differentiated from documents that represent some form of communication (e.g. official records, newspapers, diaries)” (p. 139). The researcher requested that principals share documents that helped them tell their stories as early implementers of the CCSS and that included evidence used by principals to determine their instructional actions. These documents included items that they created, notated, or reviewed when seeking to understand the CCSS and determine leadership actions needed to facilitate instructional changes at their sites. Such
personal documents, or artifacts, included classroom walkthrough forms, faculty meeting agendas, and rubrics. During the interviews, the researcher asked the participants to refer to the documents as part of the storytelling process, as Merriam asserted that personal documents are “a reliable source of data concerning a person’s attitudes, beliefs, and view of the work” that also reflect the “participant’s perspective” (p. 143).

**Steps for Data Collection**

Creswell (2008) identified key steps for data collection. According to Creswell, these steps include collecting the stories of the participants in which the setting and place are described; describing the participants’ stories; analyzing the stories for themes; and retelling, or restorying, the individuals’ stories. Throughout the phases of investigation, the researcher collaborated with the participants. The final step in conducting narrative research included writing the final story about the participants’ experiences and validating the correctness of the story (Creswell, 2008). This final presentation of the participants’ experiences includes a narrative account of each principal’s story, followed by a cross-case analysis of the themes and findings.

When conducting narrative research, it was imperative that the researcher maintain accuracy in chronicling each participant’s story (Creswell, 2008). This meant that the researcher had to “analyze and report a chronology of an individual’s experiences” (Creswell, 2008, p. 518). Creswell (2008) asserted that in narrative research, the “researcher analyzes and writes about an individual life using a time sequence or chronology of events” (p. 518). Riessman (1993) asserted that many scholars “treat narrative as discrete units, with clear beginnings and endings” (p. 17). Likewise, Creswell (2008) indicated that in narrative research, stories often have “a
beginning, middle and end” (p. 518). Therefore, the researcher told the principals’ stories in a chronological, organic manner in which themes were highlighted and analyzed.

Restorying occurred, consistent with Creswell’s (2008) description regarding when a researcher “gathers stories, analyzes them for key elements of the story . . . and then rewrites the story to place it in a chronological sequence” (p. 519). For this study, the story elements were organized into the three-dimensional space framework described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Originating from Dewey’s view of experience, this structure included “situation, continuity and interaction” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 49). Through the lens of this framework, the researcher engaged in a multidirectional approach in which she traveled “inward, outward, backward, forward and situated within place” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 49).

Upon completion of the interviews, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings before beginning the process of field-text analysis. When completing the analysis, not only were the answers of the participants included, but the researcher also considered the “characteristic of the interview situation” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 164). The researcher used the NVivo 10 software program to code and organize themes. The themes were identified according to the research questions and were linked to the conceptual and theoretical framework that formed the structure for the study. Coding and recoding of themes occurred in order to ensure reliability and validity. Both the transcriptions and audio recordings were used as the researcher organized the themes from the interviews. By combining the field text, the researcher’s field notes, and artifacts, the researcher analyzed the total data set to determine themes. Ultimately, crystallization (Richardson, 1994) of the data occurred in which the researcher cross-
compared the interview transcripts and recordings, field notes, and artifacts (Creswell, 2008; Yin, 2009).

**Data Security**

All data were securely maintained and stored electronically on the researcher’s password-protected laptop and on an external drive. Interview transcriptions, audiotapes, field notes, and artifacts were kept in a locked cabinet located in the researcher’s home office. Provisions for confidentiality and anonymity were appropriated for each participant both during and following the completion of this study. Participant information was kept in a different, locked location in the researcher’s home office where it could not be linked to the participant pseudonyms provided by the researcher. All calendar appointments also consisted of pseudonyms instead of identifying school and principal names.

**Data Analysis**

The process that narrative researchers must follow when moving through the stages of data collection, including the transcription of interviews, is complex (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). According to Creswell (2008), data must first be read without the lens for analysis in order to derive a broader sense of the information. Field texts must also be read and reread with an attentive eye in order to recognize themes and to sort and code the data with dates, contexts, characters, and topics (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Although an initial analysis dealt with character, scenes, place, plot, tension, end point, narrator, tone, and context, the researcher was attentive as coding occurred (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) indicated that with narrative inquiry, “negotiation occurs from beginning to end. Plotlines are continually revised as
consultation takes place over written materials, and as further field texts are composed to develop points of importance in the revised story” (p. 132).

Drawing on Bruner’s types of cognition, Polkinghorne (1995) asserted that narrative inquiry could be conducted using two approaches of data analysis: the paradigmatic approach and narrative analysis. The narrative analysis approach was also referred to by Polkinghorne (2010) as narrative thinking. These two approaches were further described by Polkinghorne as follows:

Paradigmatic thinking structures experiences by identifying them as an instance of a concept or category. It is used when answering a question such as what kind of thing is that. For example, is that depression or anxiety? Narrative thinking structures experience temporally. It is used when answering a question such as how did that affect or influence what came later. (p. 396)

For data analysis, the researcher utilized both the narrative analysis and paradigmatic approaches. This decision to use the paradigmatic approach was made because the researcher was interested in determining if themes or categories within the experiences of the participants existed for principals who already navigated through the murky waters of understanding and implementing the CCSS. In addition, the researcher used the narrative analysis approach because “practice is a process that occurs through time, [and] it is better conducted and communicated about by the use of narrative thinking” (Polkinghorne, 2010, p. 395). As Polkinghorne (2010) reiterated, “Practical knowledge involves narrative thinking about how the effect of actions, happenings, and events affect the occurrence of ends. . . . Narrative thinking is more closely attuned to expressing human experience than paradigmatic thinking” (p. 396).
**Narrative analysis.** By obtaining information from various sources, including interview transcriptions, constructed narratives, audio recordings, field notes, and other documents, the researcher integrated and interpreted data into a storied narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995). When engaging in this task, the researcher was charged with configuring the “data elements into a story that unites and gives meaning to the data as contributors to a goal or purpose” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15). In doing so, the boundaries of narrative research were respected in that there was an allowance for chance and human choice to be expressed in the stories (Polkinghorne, 1995).

Using the transcripts as raw data, the researcher was able to “retranscribe the raw data by identifying key elements of the story” (Creswell, 2008, p. 519). To ensure that the expressed meaning of each participant was reflected in the stories, the integration of the three-dimensional space structure consisting of interaction, continuity, and situation was included in the analysis (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Following the creation of the table in which the data were coded and organized, the researcher arranged the elements of the story into an outline to create a coherent “developmental account” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15) of each participant’s experience. At all times, the researcher was mindful to ensure the events remained in the correct chronological order (Creswell, 2008). As the story outline was created, events and actions related together, therein allowing the plot to be further refined.

Throughout the process of restorying, collaboration with the participants occurred to ensure accuracy between the told story and the written story (Creswell, 2008). Every effort was made to ensure that each participant’s voice was heard through the telling of the stories (Creswell, 2008). The participants reviewed their stories to check for accuracy.
in the chronology of events and to ensure that the meaning of their words, feelings, and experiences was reflected in the stories.

**Paradigmatic analysis approach.** By using the paradigmatic analysis approach, also called analysis of narrative, the researcher was able to “uncover commonalities that exist across the stories that make up a study’s database” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 14). According to Polkinghorne (1995), there are two types of paradigmatic search . . . (a) one in which the concepts are derived from previous theory or logical possibilities and are applied to the data to determine whether instances of these concepts are to be found; and (b) one in which concepts are inductively derived from the data. (p. 13)

Given the research questions guiding this study, the researcher was not looking through a theoretical lens but rather was seeking to identify commonalities in concepts and themes that could be gleaned from the data. In essence, the researcher developed “concepts from the data rather than imposing previous theoretically derived concepts” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 13).

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher was able to “discover or describe categories that identify particular occurrences within the data while also noting relationships among categories” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 13). By creating a table in which to note commonalities in themes, the researcher inspected the constructed narratives, audio recordings, field texts, and documents during the process of coding.

Within the paradigmatic analysis of the narrative, the researcher also employed a variation of plot by coding for the attributes of the three-dimensional space described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Creswell (2008) described this space as being
characterized by the elements of interaction, continuity, and situation. Interaction refers to the interactions “based upon an individual’s feelings, hopes, reactions, and dispositions as well as the social interaction to include other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions, and points of view” (Creswell, 2008, p. 521). Continuity refers to the temporal nature of the experience, in which the past is remembered while the future is anticipated (Creswell, 2008). Situation is the information that is presented about “the context, time, and place within a physical setting, with boundaries and characters’ intentions, purposes, and different points of view” (Creswell, 2008, p. 521). By engaging in this type of data analysis, the researcher was positioned within a multidimensional space associated with narrative inquiry in which she looked inward and outward, background and forward. By inward, we mean toward the internal conditions, such as feelings, hopes, aesthetic reaction, and moral dispositions. By outward, we mean toward the existential conditions, that is, the environment. By backward and forward, we refer to temporality—past, present, and future. (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50)

To assist with coding data for the paradigmatic analysis, the researcher used a software tool called NVivo, Version 10. The use of the NVivo software enabled the researcher to manage the process of data collection; explore the data from a variety of angles; and identify patterns, themes, and attributes specific to the research questions and framework. This specific software tool was selected by the researcher because of the features specific to NVivo, such as the navigation layout within the software system, the manner in which the software utilizes nodes for coding, and the ease of use.
Validity

In narrative research, the purpose of validation is to convince the readers that the claim is strong and serves “as a basis for understanding of and action in the human realm. Narrative research issues claims about the meaning life events hold for people. It makes claims about how people understand situations, others, and themselves” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 476). According to Webster and Mertova (2007), validity is “concerned with the research being well grounded and supportable by the data that has been collected” (p. 90). Riessman (1993) asserted that when striving for validity, narrative researchers must be thorough in describing their methods of inquiry and maintain excellent documentation. Additionally, Riessman argued that the validity of narrative research is linked to how well the researcher can shed light on future research and contribute to productive social change. Arguing that the ultimate goal of narrative research is not to arrive at one single truth, Webster and Mertova (2007) asserted that researchers should seek “a multiplicity of truths” (p. 92) when attempting to ensure validity of the study. Offering an additional perspective regarding validating narrative research, Polkinghorne (2007) posited that the readers are asked to make judgments on whether or not the evidence and argument convinces them at the level of plausibility, credibleness, or trustworthiness of the claim. Researchers, thus, should not argue for a level of certainty for their claims beyond that which is possible to conclude from the type of evidence they gather and from the attributes of the realm about which they are inquiring. (p. 477)

Although the researcher triangulated data through the analysis of interviews, field texts, and documents, the term triangulation was more loosely used than in other forms of
qualitative research. According to Richardson (1994), triangulation is used to validate, or support, research findings. Richardson issued caution in seeking “a ‘fixed point’ or ‘object’ that can be triangulated” (p. 522). Furthermore, Richardson contended that the term crystallization was a more appropriate term than triangulation. In a metaphorical display of articulation, Richardson compared the interpretation of multiple types of data and numerous perspectives on this interpretation to crystals by writing, “Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract from within themselves, creating different colors” (p. 522).

For this study, the researcher corroborated the analytic procedures by “using inductive processes that capture commonalities across individual experiences” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 475). Collaboration with the participants also served as a safeguard in validating the texts to clarify and further explore questions that arose as the researcher interpreted the data (Polkinghorne, 2007). Consequently, the researcher pursued crystallization of the data to include the various facets, dimensions, and perspectives when seeking meaning from multiple sets of data.

Reliability

Establishing reliability in the social sciences is problematic because human behavior is constantly changing (Merriam, 2009). Contrary to quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers “seek to describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it” (Merriam, 2009, p. 220). According to Polkinghorne (1988), narrative researchers rely on details associated with their procedures instead of having “formal proofs of reliability” (p. 105). By doing so, the trustworthiness of the data is evoked and accepted (Polkinghorne, 1988). Offering another point of view, Merriam (2009)
indicated that reliability refers to the extent to which research findings are replicable. Moreover, Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote that reliability is conceptualized as being synonymous with dependability or consistency. With these explanations in mind, the researcher utilized triangulation of multiple data collection methods, previously referred to in this study as crystallization, in order to obtain data that were consistent and dependable (Merriam, 2009).

Additionally, Lincoln and Guba (1985) reinforced the importance of the qualitative researcher maintaining an audit trail in order to increase reliability. By maintaining an audit trail, the researcher “described in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (Merriam, 2009, p. 223). This audit trail included critical details essential to the study, such as how the researcher recorded field notes, remained “in the midst” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20) without asserting her own bias, and collected and analyzed the data.

**Summary**

Chapter 3 of this dissertation described the qualitative research method of narrative inquiry, including the research questions, the participants, the researcher’s role, steps for data collection, and data analysis procedures. The researcher used a two-pronged approach to data analysis that strengthened the validity and reliability of the study. NVivo 10 was used as a tool to code data. This included analyzing data through the paradigmatic method of analysis of narrative as well as the narrative-thinking method of narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). Also, Chapter 3 included a description of the measures that were taken to ensure validity and reliability of the data, such as
crystallization. Finally, Chapter 3 provided an overview of how the findings are communicated in the next chapter of the dissertation.

Chapter 4 provides the storied narratives, otherwise known as narrative analysis, of the participants, followed by the paradigmatic analysis that provides a cross-case analysis of the themes and findings presented in the participants’ stories.
Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter provides the platform for the researcher to restory the narrative of each participant through the use of narrative analysis. The investigation into the journeys of the three participants, who were pioneers in their school district in the early implementation of the CCSS, resulted in three narratives, each told by the researcher in the third-person narrative style. In the interview with each participant, questions were intentionally asked that aligned to the central research questions that formed the skeletal underpinnings for this study. Through semistructured interviews with the participants and the collection of artifacts and field text, the narratives began to unfold at the pen of the researcher. Each participant responded to the questions during the interview and through continued communication with the researcher in order to obtain additional clarification or elaboration. Each narrative was reviewed by each respective participant to ensure accuracy as the researcher sought to tell each story in an accurate, reliable manner that captured the voice of the participant.

Each interview transcript was then analyzed to identify common themes and findings. This was done following repeated readings of the transcripts and involved a careful coding process in which the NVivo 10 software was used. Each transcript was first coded individually, and then a cross-case analysis was used to compare the three stories and to produce the final analysis of the narrative.

Participants

Nancy. At the time of the study, Nancy had been a principal for 15 years. She had been at her current site, an elementary school, for 4 years. Prior to being assigned to her current site, she was a principal at another elementary school in the same school
district for 11 years and an assistant principal for 2 years at a different elementary school. Before becoming an administrator, Nancy taught for 10 years in another school district, teaching kindergarten through fifth grade. Her current school was on a traditional calendar and had an average daily attendance (ADA) of 1,107 students.

**Henry.** After teaching elementary school for 7 years, Henry was offered his first administrative role as an assistant principal. He was an assistant principal for 5 years prior to becoming a principal. At the time of the study, Henry had been a principal within the same district for 5 years. For the first 3 years, Henry was the principal at a high-performing elementary school where there were 950 students. For the past 2 years, he had been the principal at his current site, which served 900 students. This was also the same site where he served as an assistant principal.

**Jana.** Jana was an experienced teacher, as she had taught for 23 years in kindergarten through high school prior to becoming an administrator. Before coming to her current school district, Jana worked in three other school districts. She had been an administrator in the current school district for 12 years. As an assistant principal, Jana spent 2 years at a smaller, rural site and 4 years at her current site, where she was the key instructional leader. At the time of the study, she had held the official role of principal at her current site for 3 years. Her school was on a year-round schedule, was one of the highest achieving elementary schools in the district, and had an enrollment of over 1,400 students.

**Nancy’s Story**

**Excitement.** Nancy was excited. Even though she had been uncertain about what she would learn by attending the Spring 2010 PTA convention, she had learned
something she knew would be changing the face of education in the upcoming years. What she had learned sounded great. She chuckled to herself that of all places, she had learned about the CCSS at a PTA convention.

Shifting ever so slightly in her chair, Nancy sat transfixed as she listened to a presentation given by teachers and administrators who were from a local high school district in Southern California. The presenters were describing the new standards that were coming on the near horizon—a set of national standards that would significantly change how teachers taught and how students would be expected to demonstrate their understanding of learned skills and content. Apparently, the testing system in California was also going to change, and a new test would be coming in a few years that was going to be much more rigorous than the CST. Nancy could feel her pulse quickening as she realized that if she did not do something about the CCSS at her school during the upcoming school year, her teachers and students would be totally unprepared when the CCSS finally arrived. She could not let that happen. Nancy described the situation:

There was a high school district that was presenting. They were talking about college and career readiness, the CCSS, and something called the “Four C’s” of the CCSS: collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and communication. That was the first time that I had received information on the “Four C’s” as well as all the assessment components coming in 2014-2015. It was at the workshop session that I learned about what the CCSS actually meant. We were going in the direction of the CCSS with a new test, and the CST was going to be sun setting in 3 years! The new test was going to happen, and we were so far behind other states.
**Building on prior knowledge.** During the previous school year, Nancy had learned at principal meetings about the need to increase college and career readiness for all students, and she had been sharing this information with her staff. Now, it all made sense. As Nancy mentally processed what she had heard in the presentation at the conference, she realized that the CCSS were directly aimed at preparing students for the rigor of college and careers.

For the rest of the conference, Nancy could not stop thinking about what she had learned about the CCSS. She considered the future implications of the CCSS and the upcoming system of accountability. Sure, it was only the 2010-2011 school year and the CCSS were not expected to be fully implemented until 2014-2015, but Nancy realized that without adequate preparation, her teachers would not be ready to teach to the new standards. She explained,

If [we were] going to have a brand new high-stakes test coming in 4 years, you can’t after 3 years do the same thing and then switch and then try to be successful. It’s not going to happen.

This new educational paradigm was on its way, and there was a contrast between the manner in which her teachers prepared students to be successful for the CST and the skills that students needed to be college and career ready. Sorting through her options about the direction in which she would lead her staff for the 2011-2012 school year, Nancy knew she had to do what was in the best interest of the teachers and the students. Nancy also knew from her years of experience that it would be important to plan ahead in order to avoid disaster, even if she did not have all the answers. Having a perfect plan was not important. Rather, she just had to get the conversation going about the CCSS,
and the rest would happen over time. Of this, she was confident. Although she did not know very much about the CCSS, Nancy did know that the CCSS were much more meaningful than the 1997 standards. The CCSS included an application aspect along with the need to increase the critical thinking skills of students, unlike the multiple-choice tests that her students had become quite adept at taking.

**Navigating through change.** Nancy ran through the pros and cons in her mind regarding her course of action. She knew she needed to get started immediately laying the groundwork for CCSS implementation. The school where she had been the principal for 4 years was a high-achieving school with an API of over 900, so if her teachers started focusing on new standards and students’ test scores went down, she would not face any state or federal consequences. However, there was no way that she could take on something so radically different from what any other school in the district was doing without district support. Propelled by a sense of urgency, Nancy made the decision that as soon as she returned home from the conference, she was going to talk with the assistant superintendent about her instructional plan for the upcoming school year.

Nancy felt energized and ready to meet with her staff, with whom she had worked so closely for the past several years. Her staff was near and dear to her heart, and after so many years of working closely with them, she knew that they would embrace this new direction. However, Nancy understood that she needed the school district leadership to give her the *green light* to move forward in this new direction.

Then, the unexpected occurred, and Nancy was faced with a myriad of challenges. In school district settings, change is inevitable. Shortly after she returned from the PTA convention, Nancy found out that she was going to be moved to another elementary
school for the 2011-2012 school year. Although she was not totally surprised, she reevaluated her intent to move forward with the CCSS. Not only did she need to get to know her new teachers, but she was also going to need time to adjust to an unfamiliar setting.

**Seeking district support.** Nancy spoke with her district superintendent and mentioned to him that she wanted to talk further about college and career readiness and the CCSS. The superintendent agreed that the district was moving in the direction of the CCSS, and he was interested in having an additional conversation with her about the CCSS. In the meantime, a new assistant superintendent had been hired, so Nancy also made an appointment to talk with him about her ideas. Nancy recounted the conversation:

> I would like to start moving in this direction next year. And I’m very interested in rolling out the CCSS. Everybody’s going to be moving in this direction in 3 years, and we’re going to have a new test in 4, so we are not going to be able to just switch in 1 year. My school has a 900-plus API, and even at the expense of the API, as I understand our API might go down, I want to begin preparing for the CCSS. I’m not at a PI [program improvement] school, so I don’t have the magnification on me. I don’t have the stringent requirements that are needed when you are at a PI school. But I need you [district leadership] to also be okay with that.” They responded with, “Yes! We are definitely moving in that direction.”

The assistant superintendent gave Nancy the green light to move in the direction of CCSS implementation. He stated that since she was coming into a new school and
would be able to lay the groundwork from the very beginning with the staff, this was a perfect opportunity. With some trepidation, however, Nancy realized the need to be careful about her approach. After all, she did not have a specific plan in place; she only knew that there was a general direction in which she wanted to lead her school, so the last thing she wanted to do was to be authoritative in telling her new staff what to do. Furthermore, she was not very familiar with the standards themselves, and she needed her teachers and the district to help her figure out what the standards actually meant in terms of making instructional changes. There was no way she could do this alone. Nancy wanted to be strategic about how she was going to implement the CCSS since she was also at the initial stages of developing relationships with her new faculty. Not only did she need to make new friends, but she also had to use her initial meetings with key members of the faculty to positively influence her teachers to embrace a new direction for the upcoming school year.

**Meeting with the leadership team.** Nancy moved into her new office, and after getting settled, she quickly felt right at home. Before too long, it was time for Nancy to hold her first leadership meeting. This would be a 1-day retreat during the month of August. She was meeting many of the eight teachers on the leadership team for the first time, including her new assistant principal and a special education teacher. Although Nancy had met a few teachers when she attended a conference on student engagement in Palm Springs that June, she had attended the conference originally with teachers from her previous site. Nancy described,

> It was late June. I had been planning to take a team from my other school anyway, and these guys [teachers from the new school] had planned to be there
with the team. Then, in the meantime, I find out I’m going to be at their site as principal, so I ended up obviously sitting with this school and getting to know them. Later, I got to know the other teachers and asked them if they would give a day before school started so that we could do a full-day leadership kick-off type of thing.

Nancy’s priority for her leadership meeting was to merely raise the teachers’ level of awareness that new standards were on their way. During the conversations that occurred with her teachers at the meeting, Nancy shared that the CCSS were more in-depth and would require students to engage in more collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity. To meet the demands of the CCSS, she shared that teachers could no longer follow a rigid publisher-driven pacing guide. Nancy noted, They’d never even heard of the CCSS, and that’s where we had to start. I had this book that the district had purchased for me called 21st Century Skills [by Bernie Trilling and Charles Fadel (2009)], and I gave the book to all the members of the leadership team. I also provided them with a poster about the standards for their respective grade levels.

There was talking, talking, and then more talking. Questions were asked, and Nancy did her best to answer what she could, given her limited knowledge of the standards. If she did not have the answer, that was not a big deal to her. No one had all the answers. So the team spent time talking about the goals of the CCSS and why there was a need for the change. Nancy knew that change could be hard for teachers, so she expected that it would take time for teachers to warm up to the idea of heading in a completely unfamiliar direction. This was especially true of the teachers on the
leadership team, who barely even knew or trusted Nancy. Through conversation, several teachers expressed their concerns. A predominant concern was that if they did not teach the 1997 standards, their test scores would decrease. Nancy stated,

In fact, one of my leadership team members said, literally verbalized, “We were never encouraged to take risks before unless we knew they were going to succeed.” I said, “That’s not a risk.” I had to share that we had district office support, even at the expense of our API. That was huge . . . huge! This was huge because the principal at the site before me had, in the eyes of the teachers, placed extreme pressure with regards to the API, and teachers had been driven to ensure that the API continually increased.

**Pioneering into the unknown.** The standards were new, as was Nancy to her site. She was learning about the standards right along with her staff, and no one she spoke with at the district level had a complete understanding of what exact changes needed to happen or how to go about making these changes. Nancy sought more information about the standards online, but still, it was definitely a bit scary heading into the unknown. However, Nancy was not too worried. While she was the “guinea pig” in the district, she reminded herself that she had asked to be a pacesetter regarding the standards. It was her choice, and she had been given the support and blessing of the school district.

Nancy was mindful that in order to accomplish any type of change, this endeavor had to be a team effort and one in which teachers could feel the freedom to move forward at a comfortable pace. Sticking true to her original intent, Nancy determined that during the first year at her new site, she just wanted to raise awareness of the CCSS. Through
her leadership team meetings, staff meetings, and informal conversations with teachers, Nancy encouraged her teachers to get to know the standards more. Not knowing what else to do, she decided to give her staff copies of the standards so that they could read them. She also sought out resources to use in professional development or to share with her teachers. One day, Nancy came across her copy of a book that the district had given her titled *21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Times* (Trilling & Fadel, 2009) and decided that she would order copies of this book to give to her leadership team since it was aligned with the goals of the CCSS. The more resources she could share with her teachers, the better.

**Expert assistance.** Before too long, Nancy realized that she needed some additional “expert” support in providing professional development to her teachers. Conversations and questions from her teachers prompted her to look beyond her own knowledge and the knowledge of district staff to others who might possess more knowledge about the CCSS. Nancy decided to contact a respected administrator from the county office of education who was willing to come to her site to provide a comprehensive overview of the CCSS. This important step would not only help her to better understand the standards but would also provide additional information to her teachers. Two experts from the county office of education came to give a presentation to Nancy’s staff during a faculty meeting in which they showed the teachers how the standards progressed from year to year.

**Figuring it out together.** Nancy was a big believer that her teachers could figure out what changes needed to happen with the CCSS a little at a time, just as she was doing. This was okay with her, as long as they were moving forward. Patiently, she
continued to invest her time and energy in working with grade-level teams and trying to figure out the standards as they all worked together. Grade-level teachers met to read the standards, and they talked about what the standards meant in terms of the instructional approaches that they used with students. Nancy encouraged her teachers to “dabble” in the CCSS if they wanted to, or they could also choose not to make instructional changes linked with the CCSS. Mandating changes would not work, but building teacher confidence and capacity would. Even so, the teachers were initially hesitant to try something new since the previous principal had placed more direct pressure on the teachers to only try things if they were certain that they would be successful. To overcome this challenge, Nancy reported, “I told the kids and the teachers too, ‘What’s the worst that can happen? If it doesn’t go well, don’t you learn from that? So, try it. Try things here and there.’”

**Determining an area of focus.** As the 2011-2012 school year continued, Nancy rallied her teachers together in order to create plans for the 2012-2013 school year. During leadership meetings, she and her teachers made the instructional decision to focus primarily on writing as an area of curricular focus. Decisions like this were always made with teacher input, and Nancy found herself relying more and more on the competent leadership that her grade-level leaders possessed. As a united team, Nancy and her leadership team reviewed the writing standards, paying attention to text features of writing. Nancy noted,

> We knew the following year, we wanted to start implementation. So, we decided that we were going to start with one subject, and we decided that was going to be writing. It would be too hard to go from 0 to 100, and we thought writing would
be the best one to start with because it has the most implications to all other subject areas.

As the 2011-2012 school year came to a close and teachers left for summer break, all the teachers on Nancy’s campus knew that writing based on the CCSS was going to be a critical area of focus when the next school year began.

During the summer of 2012, another opportunity arose for Nancy to attend a national Common Core conference in Chicago along with some district office leaders. Only a few principals in the school district had been invited to attend this conference, so Nancy was thrilled to be included in this chance to learn more about the CCSS.

Attending this conference with district leadership provided Nancy with the occasion to engage in discussions about future plans for CCSS implementation at both the district and school levels. Nancy thrived during these conversations, and with 1 year under her belt of raising the awareness of the CCSS at her site, she felt affirmed that she was able to help provide direction to others who were just getting started. While the district was planning to roll out the awareness phase for the CCSS in the 2012-2013 school year, even though the district had focused on the college and career readiness aspect of the standards with principals, Nancy and her teachers had already traversed through the awareness phase at her site. Nancy felt proud of the work that her team had done, realizing that her school was ahead of most of the schools in the district with CCSS implementation. However, she also knew that more work lay ahead in the next year. She looked forward to the challenge.

**Gaining momentum.** Nancy’s adventure into CCSS implementation continued into the 2012-2013 school year, and a sense of inquisition began to emerge among her
teachers. She could hear the buzz in the hallways and teacher’s lounge when she walked by. It was happening! This interest in making the instructional shifts to align to the CCSS was further strengthened when Nancy’s teachers observed her nonchalant demeanor when she learned that the school’s test scores had dropped by a few points. Nancy just shook it off, like it was no big deal. Teachers were also able to see that the district was fully supportive of the school and that the decrease in test scores had not resulted in a catastrophic reaction by Nancy or district officials. Nancy recalled,

> When I initially told the teachers during my first year, “Even at the expense of our API, if it goes down, it’s going to be okay.” And then, when it went down, and it really was okay, then they really knew, “She really means it.”

Nancy knew she did not have all the answers regarding how writing needed to change, nor could she influence the changes that were needed by using a top-down leadership approach. It became apparent to Nancy and her leadership team that in order to begin making the instructional shifts related to the K-6 CCSS in the area of writing, the school needed more great minds on board. To find a way to do this, Nancy talked with district staff and teachers from her leadership team. She decided to ask each grade-level team to select teachers to serve on a Literacy Committee. It was just like Nancy to ask for volunteers instead of appointing others—it demonstrated trust that her teachers would select the best people for the task. The goal of the committee was to create a plan for how the school would approach writing during the 2012-2013 school year. The committee had two teachers per grade level, and they were the leading force in accomplishing this task.
Nancy kept the telephone numbers of her friends at the district office, such as the teachers of special assignment (TSAs), on speed dial. These TSAs were teachers who had been released from classroom teaching assignments in order to support sites with professional development. Nancy was never afraid to ask for resources or run ideas by the leaders at the district, who had already demonstrated confidence in her leadership abilities and supported her as the pioneer of the CCSS within the district. This time, she shared her plan about the Literacy Committee and was pleased when the district offered to *pick up the cost* of the substitute teachers for 3 days so that Nancy could meet with the committee. It was set. Nancy, the Literacy Committee teachers, the director of elementary education, and two district-funded TSAs would meet to learn together about the changes that needed to happen in the area of writing. This allocation of a fiscal resource was very helpful.

**Planning for success.** Since Nancy desired for teachers to own the process of transitioning to the CCSS, thereby creating an organic movement on her campus, she did some backward planning to ensure that these meetings were productive. Prior to the first Literacy Committee meetings, Nancy met with the TSA, her assistant principal, and the director of instruction to create the agenda for the day. During subsequent meetings, the committee would reach consensus on the direction to go next. Then Nancy would reconvene with the district support team, revisit the agreements from the previous meetings, and plan the agendas for upcoming meetings. Time and time again, working through these leadership decisions collaboratively helped Nancy better understand the standards and clarify the direction in which she wanted to lead her staff.
Nancy and the TSAs started having regular conversations. Even though Nancy often talked with other principals about what they were doing at their sites, the TSAs were her go-to experts when she needed more information about the CCSS or needed a sounding board to share new ideas. Since the TSAs formed part of her school’s support team and participated in the Literacy Committee meetings at her site, they were able to help Nancy and her teachers define the three different types of writing. They also provided training to the teachers on the types of assignments students would need to do, along with how writing needed to be taught. As a group, the Literacy Committee reviewed the CCSS writing standards, wrote performance tasks, and reviewed student work samples, while the TSAs also trained the group on the six traits of writing. By working together, they were able to develop some preliminary writing rubrics for each grade level that were specific to each text feature. The discussions were rich, enlightening, and productive. Many of the decisions that were made during the meetings were based on what the student work products indicated. Nancy explained,

We found out about midway through that we were doing really well with information and narrative, not as much on opinions. So, we realized, “Okay. We all need to focus more on opinions. So, how are we going to do that?”

After each Literacy Committee meeting, the teachers on the committee went back to their grade-level teams and trained their teams on what they had learned and needed to do. To support the teacher leaders, Nancy set the expectation that all teachers would administer three site-created performance writing tasks. Nancy knew that if teachers were given the autonomy to decide what and how they would change instructional practices, they would be less resistant to moving forward. However, she was persistent,
working in tandem with grade-level leaders to spread the message that everyone needed to implement some type of instructional change that was aligned to the CCSS when teaching writing. This was nonnegotiable. One day, Nancy had an epiphany that because kindergarten and first-grade students were not ever going to take the CST, those teachers needed to make the changes immediately. This decision was reinforced when the school district provided transitional kindergarten through first-grade teachers with CCSS training.

**The leader as a lead learner.** While implementation of the CCSS was a priority for Nancy at her site, her administrative world clearly consisted of more than just the CCSS. She had budgets to prepare, meetings to attend, staffing decisions to make, and parents to please. To say she was busy was an understatement. However, she pressed on and worked with her leadership team to prepare for the 2013-2014 school year. Nancy reflected on the journey—had it really been 2 years since they started exploring the CCSS? Time had sure flown by. Teachers at Nancy’s site had been prepped through the professional development that Nancy provided during faculty meetings and weekly PLC meetings that CCSS implementation would be stepped up the following year to include all of the language arts standards. The fact that the school district would be providing formal CCSS training in the 2013-2014 school year for second- through sixth-grade teachers complemented the work that Nancy and her staff had done preparing teachers for the CCSS.

Nancy continued to influence her teachers during the 2013-2014 school year by providing them with training, walking through classrooms with various teachers each week to look for the indicators of effective learning, and discussing the types of changes
they were observing in the students’ academic behavior and engagement. Through these informal types of conversations with teachers, Nancy took the role of a learner. Really, she was always a lead learner, as this was her preferred style of leadership. She participated in discussions and classroom walk-throughs not with a judgmental perspective but rather with an openness to discuss the changes that needed to occur.

Meetings with the Literacy Committee, in which Nancy was always a contributing participant, also continued to transpire. The review of student work products during the Literacy Committee meetings was critical in deciding next steps.

Nancy listened to her teachers, especially grade-level leaders, as they shared the successes and challenges that teachers and students experienced. She was able to see that grade-level teams had become much more analytical when they reviewed student writing during their PLC meetings. They were able to reflect on the gaps they were seeing with specific skills and determine what standards they needed to reteach. Nancy and her teachers realized that shifting instructional practices to match all the CCSS language arts standards was actually easier than they expected since they had spent the previous year implementing changes in the area of writing. At the same time, teachers had also grown in their knowledge of the standards and were better able to determine which skills needed more emphasis.

A strong instructional focus. Although full implementation of the CCSS was expected for California school districts in the 2014-2015 school year, Nancy’s school approximated full implementation in the 2013-2014 school year. Through leadership team meetings, Literacy Committee meetings, staff meetings, classroom walk-throughs with teachers, and informal conversations with teachers, Nancy propelled her teachers to
take ownership of making the instructional changes across all content areas according to their own professional discretion. Her grade-level teams were closely aligned in the pacing of the standards, and the analysis of student work products occurred across Nancy’s campus. Nancy reviewed the work products during meetings but decided not to personally collect student work products or request specific data protocol forms from her teachers for her own personal review. Her emphasis was intentionally placed on empowering her teachers to become comfortable implementing the CCSS in all areas, not on the collection of student achievement data. Even with the performance tasks, she did not collect data, choosing instead to view the work that students were doing as a catalyst for refining instructional strategies.

However, Nancy did feel that it was important to spotlight the student work in a more prominent fashion, so she decided that each of her teachers would need to post examples from performance tasks on the office bulletin boards. By doing so, teachers were able to view the progression of the standards over time in the area of writing by displaying work from all grade levels. In considering her approach, Nancy decided that adding only minor accountability, such as the public posting of student work products, would be the best approach while teachers were still getting comfortable with the standards. However, teachers continued to collect student work products and review these products together. Teachers were looking at the data they collected, and based on the e-mails that they sent and meeting minutes, Nancy was confident that the data were providing them with the feedback that they needed to further refine their practices.

**Growing in confidence.** When the 2014-2015 school year began, Nancy listened carefully to her teachers during grade-level meetings and leadership team meetings, and
she could tell that her teachers were feeling more confident in their ability to teach the CCSS, although they were still feeling stressed and overwhelmed. However, compared with the feedback she received from other teachers and other principals across the school district, Nancy knew that her teachers were well-prepared for a second year of full implementation. Her confidence in her teachers to be able to, with her guidance, figure out what needed to happen next was unwavering. Nancy stated,

“I’m extremely lucky because I have an absolutely amazing staff of teachers. They are amazing. They are probably the best—well, they are the best staff I’ve worked with, and they’re just incredibly talented teachers. They’re hardworking. They’re really, really good. And even as good as they are, they still are always looking to improve. And they love the school. They love each other. They want to be better even though they’re great. And so, that’s very lucky. I’m very lucky in that way.

At the time of the study, Nancy and her staff were looking forward to receiving scores for their students following the first official SBAC test administration. Even though they expected that the scores would be low, Nancy’s mindset was geared to how receiving these results would help inform future decisions. There would be no scolding if the scores came in low, and Nancy’s teachers no longer worried that low scores would get them in trouble.

In reflection, Nancy looked on the last 4 years as an exciting time when she was allowed to promote trust, foster collaboration, and empower her teachers to take ownership of their craft while transitioning to the CCSS. In retrospect, Nancy saw that while she had a loosely crafted implementation plan, she was right to move forward with
an instructional emphasis on writing as a first step, as this helped her teachers to better understand the reading standards, since writing and reading are inextricably linked. With the strong support from the school district, Nancy embraced the unexpected once again. While there would certainly be more to learn, there was no doubt in Nancy’s mind that her site was headed in the right direction.

**Analysis of the narrative.** Nancy’s story highlighted one principal’s journey in which the social and organizational aspects of sensemaking brought clarity to the process of implementing the CCSS. Although Nancy’s definite call to action was a predominant theme throughout the narrative, the narrative also described the fundamental role that the organizational structure of both the school and the district had in making sense of the CCSS and leading change regarding the instructional practices associated with the CCSS. Working in tandem with the district leaders as well as through her teacher leaders, Nancy was able to efficiently guide her teachers into the unfamiliar territory of the CCSS while fostering a safe climate in which risk taking was promoted. While Nancy’s approach was embedded in clear instructional goals created through communication with her teacher leaders, such as transitioning to the CCSS first by focusing on the writing aspect of the CCSS, her leadership actions indicated that providing professional development to her teachers was a fundamental priority.

In navigating through the sensemaking process related to the CCSS, Nancy’s narrative also indicated the importance of bracketing and organizing the CCSS into manageable areas of focus. As the narrative unfolded, it was clear that the collaborative process of first noticing what was different with the CCSS and then bracketing a writing framework assisted Nancy and her teachers in deriving meaningful information about the
CCSS that guided their decision-making process. The school was grappling with a certain level of cognitive dissonance as teachers tried to wrap their heads around the new requirements of the CCSS while simultaneously “unlearning” past and deeply ingrained practices.

Finally, the lived story through Nancy’s perspective illustrated that the leadership actions of allocating resources, determining priorities by prioritizing key steps needed for the implementation process, and establishing a clear purpose when providing direction to her faculty were vital in the successful transition to the CCSS at Nancy’s school.

**Henry’s Story**

**Before the CCSS.** Henry had always wanted to be a teacher. That is what he wanted to do when he was an undergraduate student in college, and following completion of his teaching credential, that is exactly what he did. Making the move into administration happened naturally, and after 5 years as an assistant principal at a highly collaborative site, Henry was promoted to be the principal of the highest performing elementary school in the district. At this site, test scores were so high that there were only a few students considered at risk, which resulted in a stronger sense of teacher efficacy. The school year was 2010-2011, and Henry had not yet heard about the CCSS. Nevertheless, he began sharing the need to shift instructional practices so that students could learn at a deeper level, but his teachers questioned why this was even necessary. Did their test scores not demonstrate that students were already thinking at high levels? Were the test scores not the result of excellent teaching? Certainly, being such outstanding teachers should exempt them from needing to change what and how they were teaching.
Beginning in the first year at this site, Henry realized that leading his staff to make instructional changes was going to require quite a savvy approach. While he had begun focusing on increasing levels of student engagement as part of a local initiative with an outside consultant, he also discovered that the teachers at his school were much more likely to be receptive to ideas if they came up with the ideas on their own. Since his site was not a Title I school and the economy had not yet rebounded from the recession, Henry had limited access to resources. Nevertheless, he offered teachers the chance to do instructional classroom walk-throughs on the campus to look at levels of student engagement. These walk-throughs occurred during teachers’ recess or lunch breaks and were strictly voluntary. As these walk-throughs progressed, the few teachers who attended began to make connections about student engagement, and together, Henry and the participating teachers had some enlightening conversations. Henry learned through this process that while teachers did not respond very well to a top-down approach from administration, if they could come along side by side with the administrator, they were more open to learning.

**Looking forward.** Henry had heard mention of the CCSS and college and career readiness during the 2010-2011 school year at principal meetings. At these meetings, Henry learned about the CCSS—what the standards were, how they were written, and what they looked like—and he became somewhat familiar with key terms. He spent time during principal meetings reading the standards and determining how the standards progressed from year to year, up through Grade 12. Remembering the painful transition that teachers experienced when the 1997 standards were developed and then followed by high-stakes testing, Henry realized that change with the CCSS was inevitable. He knew
that his teachers needed time to process the new standards and get used to teaching the standards in order to ease the adjustment once the standards were required for implementation during the 2014-2015 school year. So, he started to share about the CCSS with his teachers in an attempt to raise awareness.

**Navigating potential barriers.** Armed with an understanding of the unique dynamics that characterized his faculty, Henry knew he needed to take an indirect route to accomplishing the goal of raising awareness about the CCSS. While Henry was looking forward to transitioning to the CCSS, he knew that teachers at his site were likely to be resistant. Another barrier that Henry faced was that even though he was anxious to start *digging* into the standards, the need to make such a large-scale change was at the same time overwhelming. There was so much that was unknown about the CCSS.

Henry had read the standards, looked at the progression of the standards from grade level to grade level, and learned about the new assessment that was coming, but he still was not quite sure of all the instructional implications of the standards. Nevertheless, he pressed forward and began sharing about the CCSS with his staff on a basic level. Initially, Henry offered training at his site during faculty meetings in order to simply raise awareness. Then, he learned about a training opportunity on the CCSS that was happening at the county office of education. To motivate teachers to attend this training, he began asking his teachers questions such as, “Hey, is anybody interested from your grade level in attending a training on the CCSS? I’m going to this. We know they are coming. We just don’t know what they are. Who wants to find out more?”

Henry ended up taking four team leaders to this workshop on the CCSS. His teachers were surprised that they were the only other teachers in the room at this
training—the rest of the attendees were administrators. This was a good thing since Henry’s teachers felt empowered to share information that only a few teachers possessed. Henry was hoping that they would be motivated to go back to the site and tell the other teachers about the CCSS. He wanted their help in laying the groundwork with the rest of the staff. At this workshop, Henry and his teachers received a large binder that contained all the standards, including information about what teaching the CCSS would entail and how the new assessment was going to be different from the CST. Together, Henry and his teachers spent the whole day during the workshop exploring the standards and trying to figure them out. To his satisfaction, his strategy worked. These teachers began taking a leadership role during staff meetings and helped Henry get the word out to other teachers about the changes that the CCSS would require. Although raising the awareness of the CCSS developed at a snail’s pace, there was some increasing teacher interest in the CCSS. Henry noted,

They could see that the CCSS were more focused and that they would be able to continue with standards year after year and really be able to teach it well. They were glad to see some of the trivial things like handwriting decreasing in importance, and they were excited to see a greater emphasis on levels of thinking.

**Rigor and engagement.** At any site, there are typically several initiatives or items that need attention during the course of the school year; the same was true at Henry’s site. The CCSS were not the sole focus of the professional development that was occurring on Henry’s campus. Through a walk-through process brought to life through the district’s partnership with an outside consultant, Henry had begun doing classroom walk-throughs where student engagement and rigor were key areas of focus. Through
this classroom walk-through process, Henry trained his teachers about raising levels of rigor and showed them a walk-through form on which different indicators of student engagement could be marked.

During the 2010-2011 school year, Henry provided training to his teachers on the walk-through process and showed them the form that he would use during the visits. Data from these visits were not reported to teachers; instead, Henry tallied and summarized the schoolwide data and then shared them with the staff at the end of the year. He continued walking through classrooms to look for student engagement and rigor, often with only one or two teachers at a time. From time to time, the school district would cover the costs of substitutes, and Henry would be able to walk through classrooms with five to seven teachers at a time. As this practice continued into the 2011-2012 school year, Henry began to see the parallel between the work that he had done with teachers regarding raising student engagement and increasing rigor and the CCSS. Although unintentional, the schoolwide focus on increasing student engagement and rigor had naturally dovetailed into supporting the instructional changes needed for the CCSS. As Henry explained,

During the instructional classroom walk-throughs, the teacher dialogue became just a rich, mini-staff development, and that is where the calibration happened. That is also where the real learning took place when the teachers would say, “Well, did you see this?” or “What do you think the intent or the rigor of that was?” Teachers might also suggest that if the lesson was done another way, levels of thinking would increase.
Staying the course. Although awareness of engagement, rigor, and the CCSS were growing on Henry’s campus, it was still happening at a frustrating pace that was slower than what Henry would have preferred. He had gotten used to the tug-of-war that happened on his site, one in which he would move two steps forward only to be thwarted by teacher resistance, thereby resulting in one step backward. There was clearly a culture of distrust and a lack of openness to new ideas among many of the teachers. Regardless, Henry continued to lead the change initiative at a steady but conservative pace, always paying close attention to the emotional pulse of the school. After all, he had only shared information about the CCSS in an effort to raise awareness, but his teachers understood that more changes were on the horizon. Henry still was not sure of all the instructional implications of the CCSS but had decided to stay the course with focusing on increasing engagement for all students and equipping teachers with the skills that they would need to teach in a more rigorous manner instead of spending time at meetings poring over the standards. Henry recalled,

But even carrying into [20]12-[20]13, we started talking about the engagement elements in more detail. I had two teachers trained as site leaders for this, as the district provided an opportunity for us to have two coaches from our site trained. Even though they had their own classrooms, they could help teachers at their grade level with planning. They could help me walk through classrooms during their recesses or during their lunches. We go around and walk to other classrooms. We started collecting data that we would bring back and share as examples with the staff. So, as we would talk about, that’s when they started seeing the parallels with what we were learning about Common Core.
Despite these change efforts, progress was limited in scope across the campus. Not all teachers were on board with making any changes to their practices, and Henry still did not have all the instructional implications of the CCSS figured out. At the same time, Henry found himself needing to create a sense of urgency that could help motivate his teachers while also finding ways to support his teachers individually because they all had unique needs. From time to time when facing discouragement, Henry would ponder on a myriad of questions:

- How long is it going to take? What will be the long-term effect for this school because it’s going to take us a little bit longer? Will my team leaders that had extra training really go back and make a difference? What are we going to have to do as a leadership team?

**Cultivating the culture.** Henry also spent more time focusing on creating a positive culture at his site and doing team-building activities to help improve the culture. In fact, he was more worried about the culture at his school than CCSS implementation. It was his third year at the site, and he realized that if the culture among teachers began to improve so that they were willing to work more collaboratively and therefore became more open to trying new things, CCSS implementation would be much smoother. Henry’s teachers all needed more time, and the school district had given principals the autonomy to roll out implementation on their campuses as they deemed appropriate. Henry stated,

> In [20]12-[20]13, there was not really a lot of expectation for teachers to teach the CCSS. It was really about allowing the players who wanted to play to go for it so other people could watch. And some of them did. Some of them dove right in,
and these were the teachers that had attended the training with me. They took it back to their classrooms. They started looking more closely at the standards and started to talk about what they liked about the CCSS. And the people that were negative and needed more time watched and listened before they had to do it themselves.

However, in an effort to make his teachers thirsty for wanting to align their practices to the CCSS, Henry signed up his school to be one of the pilots for the SBAC. Next, he hired a few substitute teachers during the pilot test, so when the third-grade and fourth-grade teachers were administering the SBAC pilot test, other teachers could come visit the testing classrooms to learn more about the new test. Teachers who visited the pilot sessions came back with the realization that the manner in which they were teaching their students was not going to prepare students for the official version of the SBAC test. This helped to create a more willing mindset among some staff members as they realized that they did need to make some changes in their instructional practices.

**The transition.** Henry was reflecting on these very things and planning next steps one day in June of 2012 when he received a call from the assistant superintendent. The assistant superintendent told Henry that he was being moved back to the school where had been the assistant principal. This time, though, he would return as the new principal.

During this summer, Henry and many of the teachers at his new site had attended the district’s full rollout of what they called “Common Core Training” in which teacher grade-level teams were trained in the CCSS. He observed how teachers interacted with each other and with site administration. It was evident that the teachers listened to each
other and demonstrated a willingness to learn. The school felt different and welcoming, yet Henry was still hesitant to move too quickly with the CCSS. According to Henry,

At this school, teachers inspired each other. They collaborated more and would sit and make changes, and say, “Hey, what about this? You want to try it, and if it doesn’t work, we’ll switch. You know, we’ll just kind of adjust and fine-tune as needed.”

Henry could sense a difference in the willingness of teachers to move forward with the CCSS. The principal who had been at the site before Henry had also been doing the instructional classroom walk-throughs with teachers and had also focused on increasing engagement and rigor. Since Henry’s new school received Title I funds, paying for substitute teachers on a regular basis was easy to do. As a result, teachers in grade-level teams were used to working with each other and demonstrated a high level of collaboration and trust.

Even though the culture was positive, Henry had to shift his leadership approach and consider the needs of his new staff before drafting a plan regarding CCSS implementation. He took time to develop relationships with the staff and reestablish relationships that he had cultivated 3 years prior when he was the assistant principal at the same site. In addition, Henry needed to determine what the staff knew about the CCSS and where they were in the transition process. His arrival at his new site also coincided with a clearly articulated push from the school district to train teachers on the CCSS. In fact, during the previous school year, primary teachers had received formal training from the district and had already begun the process of making instructional transitions with new materials and lessons. In addition, every teacher was required to
attend formal district training either in the summer preceding the 2013-2014 school year or during the school year. A clear message was communicated from the district trainings that teachers would be expected to fully implement the CCSS in the 2014-2015 school year, so they needed to begin changing their instructional practices immediately. Furthermore, in the fall of 2013, Henry had also taken a small group of teachers to PLC training in the local desert. Upon their return, the group realized that they needed to restart the PLC cycle.

Mobilizing the team. During conversations with grade-level leaders, Henry facilitated discussions in which the team talked about what they had tried, what they had learned, and what changes they needed to make with the CCSS. Although it did not happen all at once, the overall consensus from teachers was that they were ready to approximate full implementation of the CCSS at the site. Teachers worked with Henry during leadership meetings to discuss the plan for the school, and Henry was able to indirectly steer the school in a forward direction. The foundational principles embedded into grade-level PLCs helped to quicken the transition to the CCSS. Moreover, since the staff had also been involved in regular instructional classroom walk-throughs, Henry continued with this practice each week. Teams of teachers would each walk through classrooms with Henry, and then they would all debrief together about their observations regarding student engagement and the rigor of the work that students were completing.

Toward the end of Henry’s first year at the site, an upper grade teacher approached him and said, “We need more collaboration together. The standards are too close together, and we need to talk together with teachers in vertical teams.” In response, Henry arranged for his teachers to meet once a week to engage in vertical teaming that
spanned grade levels. Teachers met together and dissected one of their standards. The standards addressed were selected by the teachers, not by Henry. While Henry and his assistant principal visited the meetings, meetings like this were really teacher directed. At one meeting, upper grade teachers talked about the difference between quotations and references, and once they defined the different expectations for each grade level, they realized they were all teaching quotations and references at the fifth-grade level. Together, they discussed what the precise standards meant and what the grade-level expectations would be for teaching the standards so that they could each explain them properly to the students.

**Missing the data.** At the close of the 2013-2014 school year, it became evident to Henry and his teachers that they were struggling with creating appropriate interventions for students since they did not have any data. Henry had not collected data from assessments, as teachers were trying out new assessments for the first time. Furthermore, the use of district assessments had also stopped, and the state had suspended CST testing during the 2013-2014 school year as well. Henry and his teachers experienced frustration because they realized that they did not have any indicators to inform them as to whether they were on the right course. Henry described the frustration:

> What were we going to do? Nobody had an answer for us. Nobody at the district had an answer. Nobody at the school had an answer. No principal I talked to had an answer. Nobody knew where to focus. We had this new broad horizon of standards, and we didn’t know the right thing to do.

Standing at the crossroads as the instructional leader, Henry considered his options. Certainly, someone somewhere could add insight to the direction he knew the
school needed to head. Henry decided, in conjunction with his teacher leaders, to seek assistance from the school district. He decided that he would call the TSAs who were well-versed in the CCSS—these TSAs were also seeking to work with schools from which they could learn more about what was working with CCSS implementation. Grade-level leaders also reached out to the TSAs and asked for help with specific items. With the support from the district TSAs, Henry and his teachers began making more refined comparisons between the standards, student-generated work products, and instructional strategies. Together, they were able to better align lesson pacing and expectations, which would ultimately lead to better common formative assessments (CFAs) and the ability to glean meaningful data about student achievement.

**Recognizing accomplishments and planning next steps.** During the 2014-2015 school year, Henry’s faculty began revisiting PLC core values in an effort to make sense of the CCSS in teacher practices, assessment, and instructional interventions. With Henry’s leadership, his teachers took a deeper look at their PLC practices and participated in thoughtful self-assessments of their instructional practices. With pride, Henry recollected that his teachers had implemented collaborative practices with the lens of also increasing rigor and student engagement. His teachers had created and administered performance tasks and CFAs and regularly reviewed student work products in grade-level teams. The school district created curriculum modules that Henry’s teachers would refer to or use as they deemed appropriate. Additionally, his grade-level teams set goals regarding engagement data that Henry would collect during his classroom walk-through visits and report to the teams at the end of the year.
Since it was difficult to determine what the essential standards would be because there was not a blueprint that provided this information, Henry and his teachers experienced some dissonance. With this in mind, Henry realized his teachers needed additional time to meet for instructional planning and to engage in more meaningful discussions about next steps. He arranged for grade-level leaders to be released for 3 days to identify baseline essential standards for instructional purposes. During these 3 days, teachers also needed to create common assessments based on those essential standards. Henry was mostly concerned that his teachers could identify the essential standards and discuss the best instructional practices to effectively teach these standards.

In Henry’s words, he described this experience as treading water a little bit. We are getting better at swimming and are not touching the bottom. We’re working hard to figure this out. We are so busy really trying to understand the standards and trying to implement them, and we’re constantly interpreting them and having conversations about them. So I think we’re still—we’re still going down that road.

Henry pronounced his journey into the CCSS as change akin to any kind of vacation or experience, or a major move in life. It is all unknown and just a theory until it becomes part of daily practice. Reiterating that as the leader, Henry gained momentum by mobilizing the larger group:

You have to adjust and be able to see the different options and get your people involved so they can help steer the ship with you and figure out where you need to go in order to get you there. There’s just no way the leader can sit and plan a
step-by-step process for implementing the CCSS and then lay it out at every school. It just would never work. It has to be tailored and created together.

Because his teachers had refined their practices to ensure that all students would have access to a rigorous, student-centered, and engaging curriculum, Henry was not as concerned with instructional practices as he was with the actual standards that would be taught. In other words, he was no longer as focused on the how of instruction as he was on the what. He had gained the trust of his teachers and moved at a reasonable pace in challenging his teachers to try new things. At the time of the study, the specifics were still unknown, but Henry and his staff possessed an overall understanding of what teaching and learning look like in the era of the CCSS. Even though the waters were still murky, Henry shared, “I have the best feeling I’ve had in my 5 years as the principal right now because I do have a really clear vision and focus on where we’re going and the direction the school is heading.”

**Analysis of the narrative.** Henry’s story demonstrated resilient leadership that adjusted to the unique settings at both schools where he served as the principal. While Henry did not grasp all the instructional implications of the CCSS, he did realize that action was necessary and that he had to start moving forward immediately. He chose to do this because of his belief that if his teachers, regardless of the school site, could teach at a higher, more rigorous level that effectively engaged all students, his teachers would be better prepared to teach to the CCSS. Although the passage of time helped provide some clarity as Henry and his staff proceeded through the sensemaking process, new questions and problems arose that also required some type of immediate action. Another prominent theme pertaining to sensemaking evident in Henry’s journey was that
sensemaking occurred through communication. Time and time again in Henry’s narrative, the importance of discussion, collaboration, and conversation allowed future actions to unfold. The power of the team coming up with ideas and next steps was also reiterated throughout Henry’s narrative.

In comparing the most predominant leadership actions as demonstrated in the narrative, it was evident that Henry continuously sought to provide his teachers with professional development. Sometimes the professional development occurred at trainings or conferences, but largely, it occurred at the site level as teachers learned from each other during PLC meetings, during instructional classroom walk-through visits, or from district leaders such as the TSAs. A natural outcrop of this theme also emerged as Henry aligned faculty at both sites in a manner that allowed the strengths of his teachers to benefit other teachers. For example, Henry conducted professional development during faculty meetings alongside teachers who were willing to present about what they knew about the CCSS and the needed next steps.

Finally, Henry’s story was told through the lens of transparency, which helps the reader understand the complex challenges that principals face when leading large-scale change on their campuses. The sense of uncertainty coupled with intermittent bursts of confidence and reassurance indicate that while Henry championed a clear vision of moving forward with CCSS implementation at both of his sites, he was sensitive to the emotional context present at both schools. He was able to determine priorities while also realizing that it was not possible or realistic to have a step-by-step action plan—the journey had to unfold in an organic manner in which teachers were mobilized to take ownership of both the content and instructional practices.
Jana’s Story

“Here we go again.” Jana first learned about the CCSS during principal and assistant principal meetings in the 2011-2012 school year. At first, she was skeptical about the CCSS. She wondered if this was just one more creative type of educational reform that would eventually fizzle and fade. With her 35 years of experience in the field of education, she had seen many trends pertaining to teaching come and go. Perhaps this was just another way of repackaging educational practices under the guise of a new name or an innovative idea that would not endure educational scrutiny in the long run. Jana stated,

Having been in education over 30 years, I was a little skeptical because I thought, “Here we go again,” because education trends swing. I mean, I remember when we went through whole language. We have gone through so many different changes in education.

Nevertheless, as the key instructional leader at her site, Jana knew she had to find out more about the CCSS since they were eventually going to be implemented. Through her leadership role in the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), she had access to resources that were available through the organization. She began to read information that was distributed or posted on the organization’s website, in addition to searching for information about the CCSS on various educational websites. Jana spent quite a bit of time reading about and trying to understand the new standards that she would be responsible for implementing at her site. During district meetings, Jana and her colleagues would look at ways to bridge the 1997 standards with the CCSS. The site-level administrators would consider and discuss during these meetings the historical
background of the CCSS. They looked at how the 1997 standards were different from the CCSS, and together they began to study the complexities of the new standards. Jana explained,

At district meetings, we would take a standard, unwrap it, and look at the verbs. We were really trying to understand what the standards meant. We also examined the rigor of the standards, and we looked at different charts that helped us better understand the CCSS. Rigor was a big thing. While the 1997 standards were thin and wide, the CCSS were more narrow and deeper in content and in concepts.

The more Jana looked at the verbs that specified the actions required by the standards and read the framework that accompanied the standards, the better she understood the expected student outcomes. However, she was still an emergent learner and only a step or two ahead of her teachers. Despite this, Jana did not worry about her limited knowledge—she knew that would develop over time. What was important, though, was that she did not wait to get started.

**Feeling the responsibility.** Jana was basically in charge of all instructionally related items at her school, even though she was the assistant principal. With her principal retiring at the end of the 2011-2012 school year, Jana knew that preparing the teachers at her site for the CCSS fell directly under her realm of responsibility. Truth be told, she had been the instructional leader at the site for many years, and therefore, the pressure to inform teachers about the CCSS fell on her shoulders. She also knew—or at least hoped—that she would lead the school the subsequent year when the principal retired. After all, she had been the assistant principal at the site for 6 years. Regardless,
something had to be done, and Jana was the one responsible for figuring out how to approach this new path of change that was coming soon.

**A teacher at heart.** Consistent with Jana’s leadership style, she began raising awareness simply by asking her teachers what they knew about the CCSS. Jana often approached any type of change initiative by increasing the curiosity level of her teachers. Her 23-year experience as a teacher in kindergarten through high school had left an indelible mark on how she thought about making changes on her campus, and so she deliberately tried to think about how teachers would respond as a baseline for guiding her actions. She remembered how her level of receptiveness increased when, as a teacher, she had been asked to share her opinion, her knowledge, or her ideas about anything new that impacted her classroom. As Jana put it,

> I’m a teacher first. I never take off that teacher hat because that is what the teachers recognize. They know that I have “been there” and “done that.” The teachers know that I have taught many different grade levels. Also, they know that I know what it is like to struggle as a teacher. So, I am very transparent with them.

Since Jana was frequently out and about on her campus supervising students, visiting classrooms, and talking with teachers, she began asking her teachers during informal conversations if they had heard about the CCSS. Jana asked them if they knew about the new standards that were coming in the next few years. Had they heard anything about the way that the assessment process for the state would be changing? Were they interested in learning more about the CCSS? If so, what did they want to know about first? Through these conversations, Jana was able to obtain a better grasp of
what she needed to first learn about the CCSS in order to effectively guide her teachers to an increased understanding.

It was a bit tricky to have these deliberate conversations with all teachers because of the year-round nature of Jana’s site. It seemed that there was always at least one fourth of her teachers off track. However, she knew that her teachers did a good job of e-mailing the off-track teachers updates about what was going on around the campus. Still, Jana listened to her teachers and considered their input. She did not want them to feel nervous or anxious; she only wanted them to know that change was on its way.

**Putting toes in the water.** Jana recalled,

I was thinking of the type of teachers that I had and how I was going to present information to them about the CCSS in a way that they would feel successful about implementing the standards. They had to be able to see that it was possible. They also needed to see the value in it, and they needed to see that we were in this together. I told my staff that we were just going to put our toes in the water and see what was going on with the new standards.

As Jana started talking with teachers about the CCSS, her internal mantra became *go slow to go fast*. This mantra was consistent with the direction that she was receiving from the school district. After attending district meetings, she would choose what information to share with her teachers to raise their awareness, always considering the best approach to meet her teachers’ needs. Jana noted,

I do a lot of thinking, and I do not rush into anything. I cannot rush into anything because if I make a stand and if it’s not the right stand, I could be eating my words and losing trust with the staff.
As Jana intentionally went *slow to go fast*, she guided her teachers in discussions about the standards during faculty meetings. She asked teachers to tell her what their fears were concerning the standards and to share their suspicions about the CCSS. The conversations were helpful in providing meaning and direction regarding how teachers felt about implementing the new standards. During the 2011-2012 school year, Jana’s primary goal was increasing teachers’ comfort and familiarity with the CCSS so that they would be more receptive to implementation during the 2012-2013 school year. In so doing, her own understanding of the standards and their implications for teaching and learning grew in depth and specificity.

“There are no lone rangers.” As Jana anticipated, she was hired to be the principal at the same site beginning in the 2012-2013 school year. Since she had been at the same school for 6 years, she was fortunate in that she knew her teachers and did not need to forge new relationships with them. Her tenure at the site also meant that she already recognized the critical needs that existed, such as the need to strengthen teacher collaboration when it came to lesson planning. She knew that there was no way that her teachers could figure out the CCSS while continuing to work in isolation. Jana felt that she “just had to come up with something that wasn’t threatening and they could do.” This was especially true because moving into the era of the CCSS would require teachers to work together more than they ever had in prior years. With this need at the forefront of her mind, Jana took an indirect route to CCSS implementation during the 2012-2013 school year and told her teachers that every teacher had to find at least one teacher to meet with for lesson planning. She told the teachers,
You need to understand something. In order for you to be successful with the CCSS and not kill yourself by being a one-person show, you need to choose someone else to plan with. Beginning this year, you must plan with somebody, because we are year-round, and every month, another track goes on break and a new track begins. So, everyone has to plan with someone. Who do you plan with? There are no lone rangers anymore. Tonto has left the building.

Jana required teachers to tell her whom they would be planning with to create lessons and to study the standards. Pretty soon, the phrase “There are no lone rangers” became another mantra that Jana repeated over and over again when reinforcing the need for teachers to work together. Grade-level teams would also meet each week for PLC time, and with the combination of increased teacher planning and collaboration, teachers began to dabble in teaching some of the CCSS.

**Delving into the CCSS.** While some grade-level teams dabbled in teaching the CCSS, others struggled, but everyone reviewed the CCSS together with a colleague. Jana’s goal was for teachers to learn from each other, just as she learned right alongside them. Teachers met together to examine the standards and figure out what the standards actually meant in terms of creating instructional objectives. While some faculty meetings focused on other items essential for the functioning of the school, many faculty meetings during the 2012-2013 school year included professional development on the CCSS. Sometimes, Jana would show clips from the Teaching Channel that highlighted an aspect of the CCSS. Other times, she would give a presentation that she received at a principal meeting, as the presentations and resources from principal meetings were always accessible for principals to use during their own faculty meetings. According to Jana,
I would take best teaching practices off the Teaching Channel that would help introduce CCSS in a way that kids could understand it and teachers could understand it. I would show clips, and then we would stop, and we talked about it. I wanted to know their feelings. I wanted to hear teachers share out their ideas.

Jana felt it was more important to ensure that her teachers really understood the standards and were comfortable with them than it was for every teacher to teach the CCSS. Teachers in some grade levels, such as kindergarten and first-grade teachers, had attended district trainings on the CCSS, but the majority of Jana’s staff had not had formal training on the CCSS other than what was offered at the site. It was equally important to Jana that teachers were involved in presenting information about desired strategies and ideas instead of always hearing from her during the meetings. To accomplish this goal, Jana would arrange to have teachers share how they had taught a CCSS lesson during faculty meetings. As Jana explained,

When I went into a classroom during my walk-throughs and I saw someone that did an unbelievable job teaching a CCSS lesson, I would have them share at a staff meeting. I would tell the staff during the meetings that I saw some good things during my walk-throughs and that some teachers were going to show a lesson that they did that was considered a Common Core lesson. Then we were able to talk about how Common Core lessons looked different from lessons with the 1997 standards. We could talk about the similarities and differences.

Jana could tell from her walk-throughs and conversations with teachers that her school was moving forward with CCSS implementation. With each grade level, she
noticed teachers trying out lessons in language arts and mathematics in which students were thinking at deeper levels and doing more writing. There were still some reluctant teachers who took the approach that they would wait to teach the CCSS during the 2013-2014 school year, but many teachers were trying out new lessons that were aligned with the instructional shifts of the CCSS. Additionally, Jana found that teachers were becoming more influential in helping hesitant teachers to become more open-minded about trying a lesson based on the CCSS. She recalled,

We had some superstars that would bring other teachers around. Now, were they all on the boat? No. They were not all on the boat, but those that were not moving forward quickly were waterskiing just behind the boat.

The gradual increase of implementation expectations. In the fall of 2013, it was time to move forward and take the staff to the next level of CCSS implementation. Jana had given her teachers 2 years to grapple with the standards and increase their understanding of how instruction was different in the era of the CCSS. Yet, there were still some teachers who continued to “waterski behind the boat,” and Jana decided that it was time that everyone jumped on board. She stated,

In 2013-2014, I decided it was time that we really had to jump into Common Core on an instructional level. It was gradual, but eventually I got to the point where I said, “We all need to just try to teach something, anything, that is based upon the CCSS.”

At the same time, Jana realized it was also important that teachers experienced success as they transitioned to the CCSS. She wanted teachers to try lessons that they were interested in or to take lessons that they had taught with the 1997 standards and
change the lessons into CCSS lessons. She continued her practice of talking with teachers about how they were doing and asking them how it was going teaching CCSS lessons. Those teachers who had tried lessons and felt they were successful were more empowered to continue implementing the CCSS. Jana also began working with the same consultant with whom many of her colleagues had worked and had begun taking teachers on classroom walk-throughs to look for evidence of increased rigor and student engagement.

Other needs also began to surface. For example, it was evident that teachers needed to begin identifying essential standards, as Jana could tell that her teachers were confused about which standards were most important. Even though they were now in their third year of transitioning to the CCSS, Jana could see that her teachers were experiencing frustration in deciding what standards they needed to teach. Jana reported,

One of my grade-level teams was reflecting on the language arts standards, and they were not arguing, but they had different opinions on what was essential. They were also trying to decide what a certain standard meant. So, I bought two books for each grade level that I thought would help them. Then, I would go to their PLC meetings and would listen to their conversations, and I would say, “Hey, have you looked at that book yet?”

The school district also provided additional layers of support that complemented Jana’s expectations for CCSS implementation. Teacher training opportunities on the CCSS were provided by the school district during the 2013-2014 school year. Teachers began signing up for what the district called “symposiums,” where they could learn more about the CCSS. If teachers attended trainings when they were on break, they were paid.
If they attended the trainings during the school year, substitute teachers were provided by the school district. During these trainings, teachers chose workshops that interested them, such as depth of knowledge (DOK; Webb, 2002), close reading, classroom management, student engagement, or increasing rigor. To bring this new knowledge back to the site, after teachers attended trainings, Jana asked them to report out to the staff during faculty meetings to share what they had learned. She stated,

I let them decide what they would share because they all learned different things at the district trainings. I said, “Take what you’ve learned at the trainings and share it with your team.” Then, they would share it at a staff meeting.

**Building on a strong foundation.** Jana and her teachers grew together in the process of closely examining the standards and working collaboratively in teams, and her leadership team was able to attend some additional PLC trainings together. The important work that Jana had done in laying a solid foundation for her teachers became noticeable during the 2014-2015 school year when full implementation of the CCSS was expected statewide. The teachers were working together on a regular basis to debrief about what worked, plan lessons on essential standards, and attempt to find meaningful data that they could use for identifying students for interventions.

The teachers at Jana’s site had also become familiar with the SBAC field test during the previous year, and for the 2014-2015 school year, they knew that the SBAC would count as baseline data. In addition, the district had created benchmark assessments, and Jana’s teachers had begun administering these tests. Jana was able to use the data from these tests to see which teachers were experiencing success with raising levels of student learning and who was still struggling, but the benchmark tests were also
new and had not been vetted to ensure accuracy in the information that they provided. During her frequent classroom walk-through visits, Jana gleaned information on what was needed in terms of professional development, accountability, or teacher support.

In addition, Jana continued to provide teachers with professional development during staff meetings. However, the choices as to what she should place on the agenda seemed numerous, and she was frequently reflective after the meetings, wondering if she presented what the teachers needed or if she should have presented something else. She noted,

This year, every time we presented something, there [was] something else that I could have presented that had just as much value. I asked myself a lot of questions, such as “Do I start with this? Do I start with that?”

**New challenges.** While the actual teaching of the CCSS was not as stressful anymore for teachers, there were other areas that caused dissonance regarding the implementation of the CCSS during the 2014-2015 school year. Jana’s teachers had been very skilled at analyzing CST data and teaching testing strategies in order to increase students’ scores on the CST, but by the 2014-2015 school year, the CST was gone for a second year in a row. The teachers had no hard and fast data that could provide accurate feedback regarding how well students were learning. Furthermore, the lack of CFAs had also become a compelling need at Jana’s site. Jana described the dilemma:

We want to do the Common Core, but how do we improve since we don’t have any data to analyze? It is like a catch-22 all the way around. So, we keep coming back to doing whatever feels right. I’m also coming to the realization that we need help with common formative assessments. I need to find somebody that can
help me present that to the teachers. So, I’m going to be talking to our TSAs to see if they can come and help us.

Jana and her teachers also realized that students’ grasp of the basic math skills of adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing needed to be strengthened. Furthermore, they recognized that student skills in writing basics, such as writing coherently and using capitalization and punctuation, had declined over time. Student use of correct grammatical patterns was weak across all grade levels. How could this have happened when the teachers had been working so hard to increase critical thinking, spark engagement, and promote a more rigorous program? Clearly, Jana had to support her teachers in maintaining a better balance in basic skills instruction across the campus while still teaching the CCSS.

**Next steps.** Jana was the first to admit that while she knew that her teachers were further along with the CCSS implementation since she started building awareness 4 years earlier, the process of getting instruction, assessments, and data to accurately parallel the rigor of the CCSS would take years. The further along she and her teachers moved with CCSS implementation, the more they realized that there was much that they still needed to learn and figure out. Not only had the need for data become an issue, but Jana’s teachers also realized the need to begin vertically aligning the standards. As Jana explained,

I spent most, a lot of my money on subs this year to give teachers an opportunity to meet in vertical teams. My sixth-grade [team] was able to go to the two middle schools where our students matriculate after leaving our school. They were able to meet and get started doing some vertical planning that they found helpful.
Yet, Jana expressed some frustration because at times, there was still uncertainty about what CCSS teachers were actually teaching at each grade level. Now that her teachers had had several years to delve into the CCSS, they needed to go back and revisit the essential standards on a horizontal (grade-level team) and vertical level.

**Reflection.** Jana continued to reflect on everything she did and still moved slow to go fast. Engaging in frequent conversations with her teachers about what was working, what they needed help with, and what they thought should be done to increase student learning with the CCSS remained Jana’s top priorities. As a leader who desired to operate in transparency, Jana was not afraid to admit that this would not be a flawless journey. She stated,

I’m perfectly honest with my staff. I tell them that while I know we started this process, I’m coming to the realization that we need to go back a few steps. We need to go back to reviewing the essential standards. This has been a learning experience for all of us, and I think it is going to take 3-5 more years before we really understand what we are doing.

At the time of the study, Jana and her teachers were delving deeper into math and language arts instruction. Her teachers were finding that they could teach reading lessons during science and social studies units. It was a new concept for her teachers to be able to take a social studies text and use it as part of their reading content. In science, teachers were finding that they could actually teach math in a way that students could relate to as real-life applications. These realizations caused Jana’s face to light up. While she and her teachers still had a long way to go, much had already been accomplished. According to Jana,
We’re not done by any means. It has been two steps forward and one step back. Two steps forward and one step back, and review, review, review. This type of spiral review is going to be going on for several years to come.

**Analysis of the narrative.** Jana’s narrative described her experience implementing the CCSS that was characterized by several leading sensemaking principles and leadership actions. The importance of making sense of the CCSS through the process of moving into action was demonstrated as a predominant, constant theme throughout the narrative. The anticipation of the CCSS propelled Jana to move forward in educating her teachers about the standards despite the fact that she possessed only a limited understanding of the standards.

As the most heavily coded sensemaking principle in the narrative, taking action to learn about the CCSS by working side by side with teachers speaks to the importance of sensemaking through communication. While Jana took action aimed at making sense of the CCSS, such as watching the Teaching Channel, attending district meetings, reading articles from websites, doing classroom walk-through visits to observe students learning during CCSS-aligned lessons, and finding other resources that helped her make sense of the CCSS, her most frequent action was to engage in intentional communication about the CCSS with her teachers. The narrative highlighted Jana’s ability to increase her own understanding of the CCSS as well as to determine her future leadership actions through the process of asking teachers questions, listening to their responses, mobilizing them to plan with each other, and then following up with additional conversations.

Jana’s story also illustrated the organizational aspect of sensemaking as Jana mobilized teachers to plan with each other, meet together regularly in PLC meetings, and
then come together during faculty meetings to learn in a whole-group setting about the CCSS. By orchestrating structural processes in which teachers provided collegial support to each other by planning together, Jana was able to indirectly motivate hesitant teachers to move forward in trying something new in their instruction that pertained to the CCSS. Finally, these actions indicate that Jana communicated a clear vision to her teachers about where the school was heading with CCSS by breaking down her vision into manageable segments so that teachers would experience some sense of initial success with CCSS implementation.

**Summary**

In Chapter 4, the lived stories of three principals who began implementing the CCSS during the 2011-2012 school year were shared in the narrative form. The narratives were carefully crafted in tandem with the participants in order to ensure the participants’ voices were heard over the voice of the researcher. Following each individual narrative, the paradigmatic analysis of narrative was presented to highlight key themes that emerged in each participant’s story. Chapter 5 includes a comparative analysis of the narratives that identifies essential themes and findings across the three narratives. In addition, Chapter 5 includes a summary of the study, recommendations, implications for future research, and reflections from the researcher.
Chapter 5: Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications

Through the stories of Nancy, Henry, and Jana, an understanding of each principal’s experience with CCSS implementation unfolded, elucidating commonalities and differences. As told in Chapter 4, each individual story painted a picture of one particular principal, followed by a brief analysis of the narrative. In Chapter 5, the paradigmatic analysis of the three narratives reveals multiple considerations identified by the researcher. As a result, the analysis of the narratives in Chapter 5 includes a cross-analysis of the themes as the stories of the three principals are considered. These themes were determined as specified by the conceptual and theoretical framework for the study. Also embedded into the following analysis of the three narratives is an interpretation of the findings pertaining to the three guiding research questions that formed the basis for this study. Finally, Chapter 5 includes the researcher’s conclusions, implications, and recommendations for practice and future research.

Analysis of the Narratives

Nancy, Henry, and Jana all began moving forward with CCSS implementation during the 2011-2012 school year. They did not fully understand the CCSS, nor did they have a comprehensive plan figured out for how they would transition their teachers from teaching the 1997 state standards to teaching the CCSS. Further, they were not able to refer to an implementation checklist that would guide them through the journey, as no list was accessible at the time. In fact, since the CCSS were so new, no one they talked with seemed to have a clear answer for how to accomplish this monumental task. Therefore, the three principals each approached the CCSS with a different emphasis that seemed right for their respective sites. Nancy focused on the writing aspect of the CCSS. Henry
focused on increasing rigor and student engagement. Jana focused on requiring teachers to plan together. However, the three stories elucidated the importance of taking action, communication, and forging collaborative partnerships with teachers in order to pave the way for full CCSS implementation.

**Overarching research question.** How have school principals made sense of the instructional implications of the CCSS? The process of making sense of the CCSS is one that is continuously occurring (Weick, 2009). While there was a definite point in time at which the sensemaking of the CCSS began for the three principals in the study, there was not a specific endpoint at which the participants arrived with a complete understanding of everything they needed to know about the CCSS. With so much to learn, each principal made sense of the CCSS in a variety of ways. However, four consistent themes emerged across the narratives regarding how the three principals engaged in sensemaking specific to the CCSS. These themes included (a) sensemaking pertaining to action, (b) sensemaking organizing through communication, (c) the social and systematic nature of sensemaking, and (d) sensemaking pertaining to noticing and bracketing.

**Sensemaking pertains to action.** One primary commonality was that each principal approached sensemaking of the CCSS by first taking some type of initial action to learn about the standards. Nancy listened to information about the CCSS presented at a PTA convention and then talked with district leadership in order to determine her next steps. Henry chose to continue focusing on instructional practices that were research based as an on-ramp to understanding the standards. He also chose to view the standards through the lens of familiar processes already present at his site, such as the focus on rigor and student engagement. Jana spent some time investigating the CCSS and then
raising awareness of the CCSS through a variety of avenues of communication with her teachers. She read whatever she could about the CCSS and then asked her teachers questions to help further her understanding. By being action oriented, each principal grew in his or her understanding of how instruction needed to change.

**Sensemaking organizes through communication.** The importance of communication and discussion was paramount in making sense of the CCSS for each principal participant. Through professional discourse with teachers about ideas, challenges, and demands prompted by the CCSS, a deeper understanding of the CCSS emerged. Early on in the implementation, each principal realized that it was not necessary for him or her to know the CCSS fully before moving forward. Rather, all three principals worked with teachers and teacher leaders to allow sensemaking of the CCSS to organically occur while still providing the leadership and direction that formed the catalyst for growth. Lindeman (1926) noted that adults were more motivated to learn if they experienced satisfying their own needs as starting points. In the analysis of the three narratives, it was evident that there was an alignment between the core principles of adult learning and sensemaking through communication as the adults were motivated to talk with each other in order to better understand the CCSS (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). Although they all learned about the CCSS at district meetings and received professional development that helped them better understand the standards, a primary process that helped each principal make sense of the CCSS was working alongside his or her teachers.

Through ongoing conversations with teachers, all three principals grew in their understanding of the instructional implications of the CCSS. When the principals
attended conferences and trainings with their teachers, they were able to discuss what they had learned with their teachers. As a result, they grew in their understanding of the standards. During such critical discussions, teachers were able to shed light on the specific nuances of the CCSS for their grade level. Teachers shared their emerging knowledge, which then had a direct impact on the principals’ understanding of the CCSS. Through each principal’s conversations with teachers, questions were asked that prompted the principal and teachers to look deeper at the CCSS in order to obtain answers.

_Sensemaking is social and systematic_. The ability to grow in their understanding of the CCSS developed for the principals not only through the organizational aspects of the school (i.e., leadership meetings, staff meetings, grade-level meetings, and classroom walk-through visits with teachers) but also through the systematic nature of the district organization. At the site level, the principals and teachers met together during leadership team meetings and grade-level meetings to read the standards. This structural element took on more meaning when the principals and teachers started to collaboratively plan lessons together, review work products, and plan assessments. The principals increased their understanding of what instruction with the CCSS looked like by visiting classrooms during routine classroom walk-through visits. These visits usually included other teachers, resulting in a rich learning experience for all.

As principals visited classrooms and observed teachers during instruction, the principals were able to see teachers approximating the use of instructional strategies needed to teach the CCSS. They were able to determine through student observations and work products how the CCSS were reflected in student learning. Nancy engaged her
leadership team in the discussion about adding organizational layers to the school, such as forming a Literacy Committee to help figure out the standards and plan specific instructional steps that could be rolled out campus-wide. She sought support not only from the school district but also by reading the standards with her teachers and attending professional development activities.

To a great extent, Henry learned about the CCSS during principal meetings and through the process of providing professional development to his teachers. By working with teachers during the initial year of raising awareness, Henry felt that he was able to “experience the standards” along with his teachers. When he considered the standards, he did so through the lens of instructional practices instead of by reviewing the precise academic wording of the standards. His approach was more “big picture” because he knew that if his teachers could strengthen their instructional practices, they would be equipped to teach even the most rigorous of the standards.

In addition, at district meetings, Jana became more familiar with the CCSS and would then come back and present much of what she had learned to her staff, thereby growing and deepening her own understanding of the CCSS by repeating and further processing what she had learned. However, her primary strategy to make sense of the CCSS was specific to the communication aspect with her teachers. Taking the approach that she was “in this with the teachers,” Jana was able to deepen her understanding of the standards through frequent conversations with teachers, teacher leaders, and entire departments. In short, the actions of the principals paralleled the social dimensions echoed by Mezirow (1991) regarding adult learners.
The role of the school district as an organization in helping principals make sense of the CCSS was also noted as a commonality in the narratives. The school district provided support by communicating a general direction about CCSS implementation as well as by offering meetings, teacher trainings, and the allocation of resources so that principals and their teachers could better implement the CCSS.

**Sensemaking pertains to noticing and bracketing.** Since each participant’s story was different, so were some of the ways that the principals made sense of the standards. This also aligns with Mezirow’s (1991) conception of how adults make meaning of unfamiliar material. While all three principals initially set out to raise awareness of the CCSS, Nancy worked with her teachers and district support staff to identify the specific instructional changes that needed to occur in the area of writing. This meant looking at the writing standards in detail with her teachers, which also prompted them to look at the reading standards. This process helped Nancy learn more about the CCSS. Nancy broadened her understanding of the standards while noticing, bracketing, and labeling specific aspects of the standards necessary for implementation at her site. This reinforces Weick et al.’s (2005) assertion that noticing and bracketing occur when new meaning is invented for an event that has not yet been given a name.

Henry also increased his own understanding of the standards by making connections to the engagement and rigor aspects he looked for during classroom walk-through visits. This was further strengthened when he walked through classrooms with teachers and, in so doing, engaged in a higher level of dialogue with his teachers about what students would need to be able to do in order to meet the demands of the CCSS. In an attempt to make sense of the CCSS, Jana worked with her teachers to compare the
CCSS to the 1997 state standards. By doing so, she was able to better understand how the CCSS were different in pedagogy and practice. Additionally, Jana worked with her teachers to compare lessons in teacher groups and discuss how the lessons could change to better align with the CCSS. This also helped her make better sense of the CCSS. Each principal leveraged unique areas of expertise and interest in the quest to better understand and make sense of the CCSS.

**Research Question 1.** How did the process of sensemaking guide school principals in their leadership decision making when facilitating the alignment of teacher practices to meet the instructional demands of the CCSS? This question was concerned with determining how the process of sensemaking influenced the leadership decisions of the principals. According to Weick (2009), “The emerging picture is one of sensemaking as a process that is ongoing, instrumental, subtle, swift, social, and easily taken for granted” (p. 131). As principals engaged in sensemaking about the CCSS, their sensemaking was not limited to simply understanding the standards. Each principal also had to make sense of what he or she would do next to influence teachers to correlate their practices to the rigor of the new standards. The principals had to decide what leadership actions were necessary in order to equip their teachers with the knowledge, confidence, and skills to be able to smoothly transition to the CCSS.

Five distinct themes evolved from the narratives. As the researcher engaged in the coding process and crafted the narratives, these themes were elucidated. The five themes included sensemaking as it pertains to action, organizes through communication, is social in nature as well as systematic, is concerned with presumption, and begins first by noticing and then by bracketing.
**Sensemaking pertains to action.** Initially, the common leadership action shared by the three principals was that they each made a conscious decision to raise the awareness of the CCSS at their schools during the 2011-2012 school year. They began providing professional development on the CCSS to their teachers, although the type and focus of the professional development looked different at every site. Every principal attended some type of conference or training with teachers from their sites. Nancy and Jana purchased books for their leadership teams that helped them understand the standards. All the principals engaged in frequent conversations with teachers about the CCSS and how the standards were working in the various grade levels.

In addition, each principal deliberately took steps to engage in dialogue with his or her teachers about the process of transitioning to the CCSS. All three principals met with teachers to examine the standards, review student work products, and talk about the challenges that existed with teaching the CCSS. Furthermore, each principal sought out opportunities to craft the implementation plan with input from teacher leaders. Over time, each principal continued to spearhead the change effort. By maximizing existing practices, such as walking through classrooms with teachers, the principals continued to build on instruction as a solid foundation for forward movement.

**Sensemaking organizes through communication.** Weick et al. (2005) indicated that when situations are “comprehended explicitly in words and that serve as a springboard to action” (p. 409). Through frequent and ongoing conversations with teacher leaders, all three principals were able to determine what they thought were the most appropriate leadership actions needed at their schools. Over and over in the narratives, the principals emphasized the importance of talking with teachers before
making decisions. A repeated pattern of asking teachers questions about the CCSS arose in the narratives. Not one of the principals made significant decisions about how the CCSS would be implemented at their sites without first collaborating with teacher leaders and allowing for shared decision making. In a sense, the principals had engaged in a type of double-loop learning in which they continually examined and experimented with their own theories of action as they communicated with their teachers about CCSS implementation (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

Since communication is a mutual process that occurs between participants (Locker & Kienzler, 2013), the narratives also indicated that the principals listened to and considered the teachers’ input prior to making key decisions. Through conversations with teachers, they were able to exchange ideas about schoolwide decisions and arrive at common conclusions. The narratives also pointed out that the listening aspect of communication between the principals and teachers was vital. It was noted that the principals relied on what teachers expressed was important in terms of implementation, assessments, and instructional areas of particular emphasis. Furthermore, the principals relied on the communication that teacher leaders had with their grade-level teams to disseminate information and generate solutions to the challenges that arose with the CCSS.

*Sensemaking is social in nature as well as systematic.* Each principal’s narrative addressed how the organizational nature of the school setting and context within the school district guided the principal in determining his or her leadership actions. This revealed some interesting parallels with organizational learning theory, as a shared vision and the importance of team learning were noted (Senge, 1990). Also, through the process
of social networking, communication among and between stakeholders brought people together who otherwise might not have interacted (Daly, 2011). While the school district provided autonomy to the principals regarding how they led their teachers toward CCSS implementation, the district provided varied forms of support in order to assist the principals in making appropriate decisions. For example, as time progressed, the district created curriculum modules that could be used in instruction. The district also provided frequent professional development to principals and teachers. In addition, the role of the TSAs proved to be a critical extension of district-level support. The TSAs were available to support principals and teachers in the transition to the CCSS. The narratives of the principals revealed that the TSAs became informally regarded as the experts on the CCSS and assisted with the sensemaking process for principals, teachers, and possibly for district office leadership.

In turn, the principals orchestrated organizational structures at their sites that supported the implementation of the CCSS. One such commonality was how all the principals relied on their leadership teams to help them figure out what to do next regarding CCSS implementation. Other social aspects that existed within the site organizational structure included doing classroom walk-through visits with teachers, requiring teachers to work together in PLCs, and arranging for regular opportunities so that teacher leaders could provide input as to what was and what was not working well with the CCSS. These organizational structures fostered a collaborative culture and helped positively shape teacher attitudes about the instructional changes that needed to occur.
Sensemaking is concerned with presumption. Presumptions arise during the process of sensemaking from “immediate actions, local context and concrete clues” (Weick, 2009, p. 136). For the principals in this study, sensemaking resulted from the current information that the principals and teachers possessed about the CCSS. Using what they knew about the CCSS, they made decisions based on a mixture of facts (i.e., a new test was coming) and presumptions or guesses (i.e., deciding which aspect of the CCSS to present at a staff meeting).

The presumptive nature of sensemaking played a role in informing the leadership actions of the principals. Although the school district provided information about the CCSS, each principal had to select what he or she believed would be most important for his or her teachers. In other words, each principal made an educated guess about how to proceed. Another common example of how the principals acted on presumption was when the principals each decided that they would not mandate data collection from assessments early on in the process of implementation. This was based on the presumption that it was more important to increase the comfort level of the teachers with the CCSS than it was to collect data regarding student learning. It was also based on the presumption that teachers were not equipped with a deep enough knowledge of the CCSS to even create common assessments. All the principals presumed that the best approach would be to allow their teachers to gradually implement the standards instead of mandating specific requirements that were tightly monitored.

Sensemaking begins first by noticing and then by bracketing. According to Weick (2009), “When people bracket a portion of streaming circumstances and label them as a concern, a bad sign, a mistake, or an opportunity, the event is at an advanced
stage” (p. 137). Each principal’s set of noticings coalesced into impressions and conclusions that then led him or her to presumptions about what to do next (Weick, 2009). Through noticing and bracketing, combined with retrospection, the identification of these concerns actually informed the subsequent actions of the principals and their teachers. For example, in tandem with their teachers, Henry and Jana noticed that not having access to assessment data made it difficult to identify students for academic interventions. This difficulty prompted a discussion with teachers about the need to create common assessments. Furthermore, Nancy’s teachers realized when reviewing student work products that students were missing some basic grammatical skills. This realization informed her future action to mobilize teachers to recognize where students were struggling and adjust their instruction to teach some basic skills. Finally, since Henry chose to initially begin at his first school by continuing to strengthen the instructional practices of rigor and student engagement, he was able to directly connect the CCSS to a focus already established at this school.

**Research Question 2.** What types of leadership decisions did school principals make, and why did they make these decisions when facilitating the alignment of teacher practices to meet the demands of the CCSS? Principals make hundreds of decisions each day (Weaver, 2007). The orchestration of knowing what to do and how to do it demonstrates artistry for educational leaders (Bogotch & Townsend, 2008). Each principal in this study made unique decisions aimed at aligning teacher practices to the new standards. These decisions were based on a number of factors that were specific to each site. When providing leadership aimed at aligning instructional practices to the CCSS, the principals were faced with an ambitious task, as the new standards needed to
have a direct impact on teacher instruction (Hess & McShane, 2013). Framed by the leadership actions suggested in the literature regarding CCSS implementation (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012), the researcher analyzed the narratives to determine the most prevalent themes regarding the types of decisions that principals made and their reasons for making such decisions.

*Align faculty by reorganizing teams to capitalize on strengths, provide professional development, and identify crucial collegial support for hesitant faculty members.* Providing professional development to teachers as a leadership action was a primary theme across all the narratives. All the principals provided frequent and ongoing professional development for their teachers. They did so because they realized that their teachers needed to be exposed early on to the multiple facets of the CCSS. Moreover, when the principals learned new information at district meetings, they determined what content would be most important to share. They selected what they thought would be most relevant and helpful for their teachers. The principals also reached out to the TSAs as an action step to seek input, make additional plans for implementation, and request professional development for their teachers.

Professional development was not limited to faculty meetings. Teachers, especially teacher leaders, attended workshops and conferences along with their principals. In addition, the principals structured organizational systems, such as doing classroom walk-through visits with teachers, as an additional form of professional development. Based on the narratives of the principals, engaging in walk-throughs with teachers was a powerful form of professional development for teachers. The principals felt that through the classroom walk-throughs, there was more teacher buy-in for
recognizing the need for change. Through the classroom walk-throughs, the level of concern was raised for participating teachers. From a symbolic perspective, this practice conveyed a sense of urgency and gravity regarding the CCSS (Bolman & Deal, 2009).

In terms of reorganizing faculty, Nancy created the Literacy Committee. The decision to form a Literacy Committee was made in conjunction with Nancy’s leadership team in order to determine what instructional practices should be areas of initial focus. The Literacy Committee met to determine specific next steps in the area of writing. Although Henry and Jana did not create new committees to help with CCSS, they also sought out teachers who would be able to influence other teachers with the implementation of the new standards. Each principal tapped into and leveraged the personal mastery levels of teacher leaders at his or her school (Senge, 1990).

Encourage risk taking so that all staff members feel safe in trying new practices. Eilers and D’Amico (2012) asserted that risk taking was a critical leadership action that principals had to take to prepare teachers for the CCSS. Each principal made a deliberate decision that since his or her school was early in the implementation process, it was important to promote a safe culture of risk taking at his or her site. The emphasis was on trying something new in order to equip teachers with the confidence that they were capable of teaching the CCSS. The principals in this study demonstrated that by teachers’ trying to teach a CCSS lesson, even if the lesson was not effective, teachers would be encouraged to learn and become more successful with CCSS. This reiterated Weick’s (2009) stance that while actions can become mistakes, these mistakes provide the opportunity for learning. It was also noted that not only did the principals encourage
the teachers to take instructional risks, but the principals themselves felt supported by the school district in taking their own leadership risks with the implementation of the CCSS.

*Facilitate professional conversations by building learning communities in which questions are asked and answers are sought collaboratively.* Supovitz et al. (2010) indicated that principals have an indirect influence on instruction by creating a culture of collaboration and communication between teachers. By having teachers actively involved in the decision-making process regarding CCSS implementation, the ability of each principal to influence teacher practices was strengthened (Marks & Nance, 2007; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2004). Almost every decision that was made about the CCSS was made in collaboration with teachers. Hence, the sensemaking that occurred was a generative process that also reflected distributed leadership in action. The principals in this study were savvy enough to recognize the importance of engaging in professional discourse with their teachers. Through discussions that occurred during leadership, literacy, and grade-level meetings, the principals supported processes in which teachers asked and answered many of their own questions. These productive conversations provided for a vigorous interplay between teachers and the three principals that was useful in determining next steps.

The importance of principals building learning communities as a leadership action was also illustrated in the narratives (DuFour et al., 2006). Since the PLCs at Nancy’s site were already quite strong, she was able to release responsibility to grade-level leaders, deciding to empower them to lead the change effort with their grade-level teams. Hence, Nancy decided to work through established teacher leaders to disseminate key information, facilitate discussions, and generate solutions. Henry realized that the weak
PLCs at his first site reflected an untrusting, resistant culture. Therefore, he decided to build on the learning communities that emerged during walk-through visits with his teachers. By doing the walk-throughs, the dialogue that ensued promoted buy-in from teachers and resulted in professional development for all participants. In contrast, at Henry’s second site, the PLCs were already strong and thriving. Hence, Henry determined that he would support grade-level leaders in determining critical next steps, such as identifying essential standards and creating common assessments. Likewise, at Jana’s school, she recognized the need to ensure that every teacher planned with another teacher. This was important to Jana because she realized that teachers would not be successful in implementing the CCSS if they worked in isolation. Her articulation of this expectation began the process of strengthening PLCs at her site, which then prompted teachers to take a closer look at their instructional practices as they became familiar with the CCSS. The three principals in this study demonstrated their belief that through PLC meetings, teachers would explore the standards, work together to plan lessons, and engage in mutual decision making about instructional practices (DuFour et al., 2006).

*Establish a clear purpose.* Having a clear purpose was essential in facilitating the sensemaking process of the CCSS for principals and teachers. It was also crucial when leading the teachers through the implementation of the CCSS. Although each principal did not have a precise plan to guide his or her teachers through the implementation of the CCSS, each set a clear direction. Initially, the principals’ established purpose was to raise awareness of the CCSS. As time progressed, each principal’s communication of a clear purpose grew and adapted to the needs of his or her school. Each principal obtained early input from his or her teachers regarding the established purpose and continued to
obtain input over time (Eilers & D’Amico, 2012). The principals used staff meetings, leadership meetings, and informal conversations with teachers to communicate their vision for CCSS implementation. Regardless of whether they were raising awareness, visiting classrooms with teachers during instructional walk-throughs, encouraging their teachers to teach a standard or strategy, engaging in collaborative planning, creating common assessments, or identifying essential standards, the principals’ communication of the purpose set the tone for the direction of the schools (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

**Conclusions**

The objective of this study was to illuminate how principals who were early implementers of the CCSS made sense of the instructional implications of the CCSS and used the sensemaking process to determine their leadership actions. The sensemaking process and leadership actions that guided the three principals in the implementation of the CCSS varied, although there were common themes that emerged. Through semistructured interviews, the researcher extended the conversations to glean additional information (Merriam, 2009). Following the interviews, the researcher listened repeatedly to the audio recordings to pick up on the subtle nuances provided during the interviews. By listening to the audio recordings, reviewing notes taken during the interviews, reviewing transcripts, and coding themes through NVivo 10, the researcher considered the multiple dynamics of the interviews in order to fully capture the lived experiences of the participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Additionally, the researcher analyzed field texts, field notes, and artifacts to determine themes. The data were ultimately presented in the form of a narrative analysis and the paradigmatic analysis of narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995). Through this process,
the researcher drew several conclusions. However, since this study occurred at the elementary level, in one school district, and was limited in sample size, caution should be used when extending the findings beyond the parameters of the study.

**Leading through learning.** While the principals in the study did not possess a thorough knowledge and understanding of the CCSS (Gewertz, 2012; Maxwell, 2013), they held the role of lead learners as they moved their sites forward in aligning instruction to the CCSS. Much of what they learned about the CCSS that informed their leadership decisions occurred through their work with their teachers (Gewertz, 2012). Surprisingly, this was not a hindrance to the implementation of the CCSS, as it empowered teachers to be leaders in the change process. This finding echoes the research of Supovitz et al. (2010), who found that teacher leaders and peers influence instructional practices. It also adds credence to the work of Wahlstrom and Louis (2008), who found that peer reflective dialogue helps to strengthen teacher instructional practices.

Through principal and teacher collaboration and shared decision making, an organic movement on each campus was prompted in which teachers gradually took the initiative to align instructional practices to reflect the CCSS. Since the standards only specify what should be taught and do not specify a rigid curriculum for teaching the standards, principals were able to work with their teachers to make curricular and instructional decisions (Phillips & Wong, 2010). The principals communicated trust to their teachers by empowering them and accepting their recommendations for next steps, realizing that the recommendations were based on “plausible interpretations of ambiguous cues sufficient for sustaining action” (Weick, 2009, p. 55). As noted by Tyack and Cuban (1995), process often trumps content in regard to the success of
educational reform initiatives. Essentially, the process of moving toward CCSS implementation as a principal/teacher partnership was more important for achieving long-term results than a top-down approach might have been.

Likewise, the importance of having strong PLCs assisted with the sensemaking and implementation process for both the principals and teachers. Conversations with teachers were a critical part of the sensemaking process for principals and were fundamental in creating the implementation plan for each school. Finally, the principals realized it would take years to figure out the CCSS and align instructional practices to meet the rigorous demands of the CCSS.

**School district support.** The role of the school district was influential in each principal’s sensemaking process and implementation of the CCSS. Through the organizational structures provided by the school district, such as principal trainings on the CCSS, principals were able to better understand the CCSS and determine what to do next. One critical aspect of district support was demonstrated through the accessibility of the district TSAs. The TSAs provided professional development and were available to work with both principals and teachers in order to foster a deeper understanding of the standards. They were a resource to the principals as they answered questions, provided input on instructional and curricular issues, and assisted with agenda planning for meetings regarding the CCSS. Finally, the TSAs may have also assisted the school district in the sensemaking process regarding the instructional implications of the CCSS.

Other forms of district support were also found to be important. The school district provided the principals with a general direction regarding CCSS implementation but allowed each principal the freedom to make professional leadership decisions. This
reflected the “loose-tight” approach described by Weick (1976) in that the principals felt empowered by the school district as the district fostered a sense of risk taking during the process. In addition, the importance of district support was demonstrated through the allocation of resources. These resources included curriculum modules, consultants who worked on increasing engagement and rigor, and funds to pay for substitute teachers and TSAs.

**Implications**

With California’s accountability system being suspended by the governor for the 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years, the principals in this study were able to try new strategies and make curricular decisions without the fear of adverse consequences that often arise with educational accountability plans. However, the official SBAC administered in the 2014-2015 school year will form baseline data for each school in California. As a result, schools across California will be expected to make growth on the subsequent SBAC tests, which are under the umbrella of California’s statewide student accountability system, the CAASPP System (CDE, 2015). The impact of the new accountability system in California may well be viewed by principals as another negative policy lever in which there are controlling mandates, regulations, and sanctions employed by the state (Marks & Nance, 2007). Therefore, school districts and principals who were late implementers may experience greater frustration in making the transition to the CCSS at the same time that they are facing state and federal accountability measures (Ujifusa & Sawchuk, 2014).

Prompted by the convergence of the CCSS and the potential for increased accountability posed by testing legislation, other implications exist for school principals.
Principals leading schools that lack organizational structures, such as PLCs, are likely to find themselves and their teachers scrambling in isolation to implement the CCSS. In addition, schools in which communication barriers exist or where there is a breakdown in principal/teacher trust may be less likely to engage in the collaborative dialogue that can lead to productive next steps. Finally, school districts and principals who lead with a top-down mentality might experience more teacher resistance. As teachers feel unequipped to implement the CCSS, external pressure placed by the district or principals may have a crippling effect on teacher implementation of the CCSS.

**Recommendations**

Through the stories of the participants in this study, insight was obtained regarding how principals who were early implementers of the CCSS made sense of and moved forward with the implementation of the CCSS. From the principals’ stories and the analysis of their experiences, the researcher traveled back in time to the 2011-2012 school year when the principals were initially beginning to raise awareness of the CCSS at their sites. The researcher journeyed with the participants through the past 4 years as she heard their stories, learned from their challenges, and applied the findings to her own work as a high school principal. According to Ramsey (1999), “Tomorrow is something that can be shaped and influenced today. Whatever happens to your organization in the years ahead will have been created, prompted, or allowed by what you and your staff do or don’t do today” (p. 32). Therefore, the valuable insight that the participants provided served to guide the researcher in making these recommendations for practice and for future research.
**Recommendations for practice.** Principals are expected to build the capacity of school sites in order to lead learning (Hallinger & Murphy, 2013). With this in mind, the importance of communication through questioning, conversation, and shared leadership will remain a vital component of building the instructional capacity of teachers to implement the CCSS. As such, it is essential that principals sharpen their communication skills in order to facilitate the instructional changes needed at their sites. Research in the field of communication has indicated that an individual’s communication skills are a key indicator of his or her success (Locker & Kienzler, 2013). As principals make sense of and move forward with the implementation of the CCSS, they would do well to strengthen their ability to lead in emotionally intelligent ways (Goleman, 2005).

Principals do not need to know the standards in depth in order to provide successful leadership with the implementation of the CCSS. With the baseline CAASPP testing already completed for the 2014-2015 school year, principals cannot afford to delay in the implementation of the CCSS at their sites. They have but 1 year to prepare teachers and students for the next round of CAASPP testing in 2015-2016, when scores will be compared with the 2014-2015 results to measure growth. Regardless of when principals are beginning to spearhead the instructional transition to the CCSS, an essential component for success is that they engage teachers in the creation of the implementation plan. As part of this process, principals should provide opportunities to foster shared leadership with teachers (Seashore Louis et al., 2010). By working closely with the teacher leaders on their campuses, principals have the opportunity to equip and empower teacher leaders to lead the change effort within their particular spheres of influence.
Principals must also find ways to establish support systems on their campuses to facilitate learning and implementation of the CCSS. With this in mind, promoting PLCs as an essential step in ensuring effective implementation of the CCSS should remain a top priority for school principals. Through the professional dialogue that teachers have with each other during PLC meetings, resistant teachers may feel less threatened to try something new if they are directly supported by their colleagues. Although new accountability measures will be established, the more that principals can promote risk taking while alleviating the fear of consequences, the more probable teachers will be to teach the CCSS and try new strategies.

It is also important that school district leadership recognize the unfamiliarity of the CCSS and the CAASPP testing system within the context of individual schools. In addition, district office leadership must allow ample time for principals and teachers to adapt to the new standards. It took years to figure out the 1997 standards, and it will take more than a few years to demonstrate proficiency in implementing the CCSS to the maximum instructional extent. Just as principals will need to champion risk taking with their teachers, school districts must applaud schools for taking steps toward CCSS implementation, even if the initial results are not strong. Furthermore, school districts must demonstrate continuous support of principals and teachers by offering professional development, allocating resources, and celebrating approximations made by schools toward CCSS implementation.

**Recommendations for future research.** The first official year of CCSS implementation in California was the 2014-2015 school year. Additional questions and problems are likely to surface over time that will form the rationale for future research.
However, this study raised three likely possibilities for future research that include extending the research to secondary principals, determining how to use a data-driven process in the era of the CCSS, and further examining sensemaking pertaining to principal and district office leadership during times of change.

Through the process of purposeful sampling, the principals who were selected for participation were only elementary school principals, although that was not the original intent of the researcher. Therefore, caution must be used in generalizing the findings to principals of secondary schools, since secondary principals face a unique set of additional challenges. In a study related to secondary principals, school accountability, and job responsibilities, secondary principals spent more time maintaining the physical security of their campuses and managing school facilities and resources than they did on activities related to student learning (Cooley & Shen, 2003). Furthermore, at middle and high schools, teachers were found to be more heavily influenced by factors outside of the principal’s control, and their areas of specialization may contribute to a decrease in their willingness to listen to the principal regarding instructional matters (Lineburg, 2010; Seashore Louis et al., 2010). Hence, obtaining scholarly information regarding how secondary principals have influenced teacher change in instructional practices to meet the demands of the CCSS warrants investigation.

This study also highlighted the struggles that teachers faced with the absence of useful student achievement data in determining academic interventions for struggling students. With the 1997 standards, principals and teachers became adept at using information gleaned from multiple-choice tests to determine instructional interventions and establish goals. However, the new assessments will require students to justify their
answers, interact with multiple texts, construct written answers that include evidence, and demonstrate success on computer-adaptive tests (Peery, 2013). This means that principals and teachers must learn to use data derived from performance tasks and other assessments whose structure for data analysis is not fully understood at this time. Consequently, research in the area of how principals and teachers use data to plan instructional next steps with the CCSS could benefit principals and teachers.

Finally, the viability of sensemaking as an explanatory theory relating to principal and district office decision making and change leadership serves as a consideration for future research. Sensemaking research specific to educational leaders and their decision-making process is not well noted in the literature, although sensemaking has been researched in depth pertaining to the social-psychological realm (Weick, 1990), the analysis of the Tenerife plane crash (Weick, 1990), the Mann Gulch fires (Weick, 1993), and how people in organizations made sense of their environments and organized in order to create meaning (Weick, 1995). According to Weick et al. (2005), “Sensemaking involves turning circumstances into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action” (p. 409), while Mills et al. (2010) posited that the need for individuals to engage in the process of sensemaking occurs when there are changes in routines, distress, or during times of organizational crisis. While this study focused on how three principals made sense of the CCSS, district office leadership was also found to be fundamental in supporting principals. The findings of this study indicate that district office understanding of the CCSS emerged over time and that the district leaders journeyed through the process of sensemaking along with the principals. Since educational initiatives have occurred since the early 1900s (Dewey, 1938) and
continue to this day, exploring sensemaking not only from a principal perspective but also from a district office perspective may prove useful to the field.
References


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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Early Implementers of the Common Core: A Narrative Inquiry of Three California Principals

Interview Questions

Overarching Research Question: How have school principals made sense of the instructional implications of the CCSS?

1. Background information: Tell me a little bit about your experience as a principal. (years of service, school site experience, length of time in the district, what did you do prior to becoming a principal)

2. When and how did you first learn about the CCSS?

3. Do you recall where you were and who informed you about the standards?

4. What were your thoughts and concerns when you initially heard about the CCSS?

5. How did you determine the instructional implications that the standards would require?

6. How did you determine/understand/interpret the underlying principles and learning philosophies of the CCSS (e.g., do you know what the standards are all about conceptually and theoretically?)
   a. Request any artifacts that the principals used to figure out the standards, any notes or journals, calendars with initial training dates, what they read, etc.

Research Question 1: How did the process of sensemaking guide school principals in their leadership decisions when facilitating the alignment of teacher practices to meet the instructional demands of the CCSS?

7. How did you make sense of, figure out, what steps you needed to take with your faculty to ensure that teacher instructional practices would align to the requirements of the standards?

8. What types of considerations did you think about when you started putting plans in motion?
9. What evidence or information did you use to guide your decisions?

10. Can you describe any instances in which you didn’t exactly know what you needed to do but you took an educated guess and move forward?

11. Who did you talk with when considering what to do?

12. Were there any systems, protocols or structures that you put in place at your site to help with the implementation of the CCSS?

13. What resources did you use to help you make sense of what to do next?
   
a. Request any artifacts that the principals used provide leadership to their faculty regarding the CCSS and related instructional changes that needed to occur, any emails, memos that you sent to staff, staff meeting agendas, notes or journals, calendars with initial training dates, what they read, etc.

Research Question 2: What types of leadership decisions did school principals make and why did they make these decisions when facilitating the alignment of teacher practices to meet the demands of the CCSS?

14. What were the key leadership decisions that you made when facilitating teacher instructional practices to align with the CCSS?

15. How did you engage teachers in facilitating changes in instruction? What strategies did you use when working with groups of teachers? How about when working with individual teachers?

16. What decisions were guided by the overall direction of the organization (school district, supervisor, etc.)

17. What decisions worked well and why?

18. Which decisions did not work out well and why?

19. If you had to go on the same journey again in leading your staff into the era of the CCSS, what would you do differently?
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT

You are being invited to participate in a research study, which the Cal Poly Pomona Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed and approved for conduct by the investigators named here. This form is designed to provide you - as a human subject - with information about this study. The investigator or his/her representative will describe this study to you and answer any of your questions. If you have any questions or complaints about the informed consent process of this research study or your rights as a subject, please contact the Compliance Office within Cal Poly Pomona’s Office of Research and Graduate Studies at (909) 869-4215.

This document explains your rights as a research subject. If you have questions regarding your participation in this research study, please contact the investigators using the information below.

Early Implementers of the Common Core: A Narrative Inquiry of Three California Principals
Primary Investigator: Janelle Woodward, (***) ***-****
Faculty Advisor: Dr. Ronald Leon, (***) ***-****
IRB protocol # 15-0123

Voluntary Status: You have met the requirements for enrollment as a volunteer in a research study conducted by the researchers listed above. You are now being invited to participate in this study. Before you can make your decision, you will need to know what the study is about, the possible risks and benefits of being in this study, and what you will have to do in this study. The researcher will discuss with you the details, and will provide you this consent form to read. You may also decide to discuss it with your family and/or friends. Some of the language may be difficult to understand and if this is the case, please ask the researcher for an explanation. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form. Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw any time without penalty and there will be no loss of any benefits to which you are entitled.

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to investigate how principals who were early implementers of the CCSS made sense of the instructional implications of the standards and how they used their understanding to facilitate the implementation of the standards. Since the CCSS call for a new approach to teaching and learning, this study can serve as a catalyst to further examine the needs experienced by principals who were early implementers of the CCSS as they sought to understand the CCSS. Moreover, this study will examine how these principals used their understanding of the CCSS to guide their teachers in implementing instructional change in practice.

Procedures: According to Creswell (2008), qualitative research is an “inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon” (p. 645). Qualitative research is conducted when researchers seek to “understand the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 13).

Over a series of two semi-structured interviews, you will be asked questions regarding your experience of making sense of the CCSS and leading your faculty to make instructional changes needed to support the CCSS. Using a narrative inquiry research design that is within the broad spectrum of qualitative research, you will be asked to “tell your story.”

Any documents that you have that help you tell your story (calendar items, memos, journals, and emails) may be requested. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Your participation in verifying the accuracy of the storied narrative will be required. After the raw data have been collected, all names will be removed. Your name will be assigned a code number. Only the code
number will be left as identifiers. The stories and data that will be gathered from participants will be useful in informing the greater body of school principals about how school leaders are understanding these new standards and using their understanding to facilitate necessary changes at their sites.

**Commitment and Compensation:** Your total participation in the study will take two interviews with an optional possible third interview if clarification is needed. Interviews may last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. At the conclusion of the study, you will receive financial compensation for participation in the study in the form of a $[redacted] Amazon Gift card.

**Possible Risks and Benefits:** It is expected that participation in this study will provide you with no more than minimal risk or discomfort, which means that you should not experience any more difficulty than what would occur in your normal daily life. However, there is always the chance of an unexpected risk. The foreseeable risks in this study include an accidental disclosure of your private information, or discomfort by answering questions. If you feel uncomfortable or distressed, please tell the researcher and I will ask you whether you wish to continue. You can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

You will not receive any direct benefits from participating in this study. However, your participation is intended to add to the knowledge about what principals are doing to prepare teachers to make necessary instructional shifts for the CCSS. Therefore, this study has potential to shed light on effective leadership practices useful in the unchartered educational era of the 21st century. School districts within California will find relevance in the results of this study since districts are charged with CCSS oversight and implementation of refined instructional strategies appropriate for CCSS instruction. Likewise, school principals will benefit from the findings in that they will be useful in informing their understanding of the CCSS mandates, administrative practices and instructional leadership strategies needed to facilitate instructional changes. Importantly, students and parents will benefit as principals increase their knowledge and understanding of leadership actions that may result in higher levels of student achievement and college and career readiness. Finally, scholars and researchers will benefit from the study design and findings as they continue to examine this critical issue. It may also benefit other people with similar concerns.

**Confidentiality and Consent:** The investigator will not reveal the personal information which they collect about you. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study -- and that can be identified with you -- will remain private and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. All participant information will be confidential, although indirect identification is possible since the sample size is small. The PI will make all reasonable efforts to maintain the confidentiality of the data by removing your name and all identifiers. Once the project is completed, all interview materials will be destroyed. Do be aware, that the results, in either an anonymous or a summarized format, will likely be published or presented at conferences.
Informed Consent Form

Agreement to Participate in Research Study (Informed Consent)
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona IRB Protocol # 15-0123

Consent: I consent to participate in two interviews with an optional third interview for the study Early Implementers of the Common Core: A Narrative Inquiry of Three California Principals (sign below)

I also consent to audio recording the interview for data analysis purposes.
___ (participant initial here)

I understand that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may decline to answer or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. I can ask that specific responses be removed from recordings and transcripts during or after the interview. I will receive financial compensation for participation in the study in the form of a $ [___] Amazon Gift card. I understand that all participant information will be confidential, although indirect identification is possible since the sample size is small. The PI will make all reasonable efforts to maintain the confidentiality of the data.

I have received a copy of the study information and this form for my records.

Print Participant Name ________________________________

Participant Signature _____________________________ Date__________

I hereby certify that I have given an explanation to the above individual of the study and its risks and protections.

______________
Researcher signature

If you have any questions, contact:

Janelle Woodward, (*** ) ***-****, email: ***************

Or

Dr. Ronald Leon, (*** ) ***-****, email: ***************

Copy to be provided to participant.