
Preface

The Common Core is everywhere! Forty-five states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity have adopted them. Common Core workshops, websites, conferences, webinars, and inservice days abound. With the proliferation of so many resources and events related to the Common Core, there is much knowledge that can be found “out there” about the standards. What has been far less captured is the knowledge that can be found “in there,” inside the intimacy of schools and classrooms as teachers and administrators work to figure out what the Common Core means personally and professionally to them.

We have been fortunate to work inside the school and classrooms of Carter G. Woodson Elementary located in Duval County, Florida, as the dedicated and courageous teachers and administrators in this high-need, high-poverty school have worked to implement the Common Core. To do so, they have used the process of teacher inquiry, defined as the systematic, intentional study by teachers of their own practice, to kick off their own Common Core implementation journey.

Seeing the power teacher inquiry held for their own professional learning, the teachers at Woodson became intrigued with the notion of translating inquiry as a professional development mechanism into a pedagogical approach to their teaching. In the process of this translation, they realized the ways that engagement in student inquiry provides a ripe context to actualize the Common Core in individual classrooms.

About the Book

This book was written to capture the story of Woodson Elementary School and the ways inquiry has helped the educators in this building embrace the Common Core State Standards and become the architects of their implementation. In capturing a real story of the Common Core

as it begins to play out in practice, we hope to provide insights that will both help and inspire the Common Core journeys of educators across the nation as they breathe life into the Common Core, translating these standards from theory into practice for themselves.

In some ways, the story of Woodson Elementary and its quest to implement the Common Core that appears in the pages of this book is analogous to Sebastian Junger's best-selling novel *The Perfect Storm*. In this novel, Junger re-creates for the reader the meteorological conditions that converged to create what meteorologists refer to as "the storm of the century." Junger described both the conditions and the impact the storm had on the people caught in it.

At Woodson Elementary, three conditions converged to create powerful learning opportunities for both the adults and the children who inhabit the school: (a) the adoption of the Common Core State Standards, (b) teacher inquiry, and (c) student inquiry. In this book, we re-create for the reader a brief overview of each of these "conditions" in Chapters 1, 2, and 4 respectively, and we share the impact this "perfect storm" had on the teachers, administrators, and children of Carter G. Woodson Elementary in Chapters 3, 5, and 6. In contrast to the destruction of the perfect storm reported in Junger's novel, however, the perfect storm reported in this book resulted in an exciting rebuilding of the schooling experience for the teachers, administrators, and children of Carter G. Woodson Elementary School.

As the focus of this book is on three different constructs (the Common Core, teacher inquiry, and student inquiry), we do not go into great depth on any of these topics. Rather, we provide an overview with a list of some of the many fine books and resources available to learn more should you be inspired by the work at Woodson and want to delve more deeply into the content, professional development mechanism, and pedagogical approach to teaching that fueled Woodson's implementation of the Common Core. While you won't find everything you need to know to become an expert on the Common Core, teacher inquiry, or student inquiry contained in these pages, you will find enough to get you started should you choose this path to begin or continue your own Common Core implementation journey.

Chapter Overview

This book contains six chapters. As previously stated, Chapters 1, 2, and 4 provide explanations of the Common Core, teacher inquiry, and student inquiry, respectively. These chapters are organized by a series of questions and answers that provide simple, basic information about each of these components of the Woodson experience.

Following the chapter on teacher inquiry, Chapter 3 shares the story of Lareal, one of the many teachers at Woodson who used the process of teacher inquiry as a professional development mechanism to learn more about the Common Core State Standards and gain insights into the ways they translate into her practice. After studying literature on the Common Core, Lareal developed an interest in integrating more nonfiction texts into her first-grade curriculum and studied her quest to do so and the resulting impact on her first-grade learners.

Following the chapter on student inquiry, Chapter 5 shares the story of Mary, one of the many teachers at Woodson who used the process of student inquiry as a pedagogical approach to her teaching to seamlessly integrate the Common Core State Standards into her instructional practice. Mary's story takes the reader through her establishment of an inquiry culture with her fourth-grade students at the start of the school year, Mary's introduction of the inquiry process to her students based on the book *Why?* by Lila Prap (2005), and Mary's implementation of an entire inquiry-based unit on conservation that culminated with her students' own investigations related to the unit. Mary's story details the ways engaging students in inquiry allows teachers to address several Common Core anchor and grade-level standards through a single project.

Finally, we conclude this book in Chapter 6 by looking across the stories of Lareal and Mary and all we have learned about Common Core implementation through our work at Woodson. We summarize what we have learned in five lessons we hope will be useful in your own quest to implement the Common Core.

In contrast to other books you may have read that focus on the conception, history, and organization of the standards or provide sample lesson plans and curriculum mapping guides, we hope *Inquiring Into the Common Core* gives you a structure to feel successful as you begin to implement this new set of standards daily and provides support for you as you construct new knowledge around the standards and how the standards translate into your classroom with your students. Our work at Woodson has indicated that inquiry can assist teachers in this uncertain time of reform and also help them to make sense of what the implications of the Common Core standards are for their teaching practices and for the structures of their classrooms. We wish you well as you embark on your own Common Core implementation journey, and we hope the story of Woodson will be useful along the way.

Bon Voyage and Happy Inquiring!