

Communication Points

Fitting it Together...

The beauty of architecture is all around us. Whether it's a spacious Victorian home, a gothic cathedral, or a simple country farmhouse, every masterpiece of design and construction begins with a set of plans that are usually very complex and that require the skills of many people to construct a building that reflects the architect's vision.



And so it is with education, particularly when building a new assessment. Think of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the Learning Progressions Framework (LPs), and the Core Content Connectors (CCCs) as the legs, adjusters, and tabletop of an architect's drafting board. They provide the surface upon which plans will be made. They keep the plans in place and store the graphite the architect will use to draw out the plans. The architect is college, career, and community readiness: the guiding force for the project's vision.

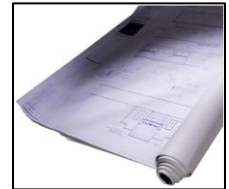


So, that leaves the curriculum - the blueprints. With communicative competence as the foundation, curriculum brings together content and teacher expertise through instruction and formative assessments, which serve as the studs, nails, bricks, and mortar.

Curriculum and instruction are essentially about understanding what needs to be taught and *how* to teach it.

The architecture analogies are intended to show that the CCSS, LPs, and the CCCs provide teachers with the "what" to teach - the infrastructure, surface, and context on which to build curricular plans - whereas curriculum is the "how" to teach—actually constructing the designs and raising the building.

Content Modules for English Language Arts and for mathematics are being developed and will be available as an online, multi-media resource that provides teachers with critical information on more complex concepts contained within the CCSS. They will provide explanations and examples of concepts that may be difficult to teach or unfamiliar to special education teachers. Additionally, they will provide teachers with potential adaptations and modifications to consider when designing materials and instruction.



NCSC will also provide Curriculum Resource Guides for each grade band that will provide clarification on how to teach specific content to students with intellectual disabilities. Additionally, the NCSC staff is developing instructional units for ELA and mathematics that encompass Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approaches into each lesson plan of each unit. While NCSC will not provide an entire curriculum, these units should give teachers a

strong understanding of how to take the CCSS, LPs, and CCCs and use them to plan and deliver their own lessons and units.

NCSC will also provide an Instructional Resource Guide that includes information on teaching strategies and how to access the general curriculum. Language Arts Scripted Systematic Instruction (LASSI) and Mathematics Scripted Systematic Instruction (MASSI) resources are being developed as another tool for teachers to use when providing instruction based on the CCSS. More information on the MASSIs and LASSIs is forthcoming, but as their names imply, they provide a scripted systematic approach to teaching specific skills.

Not to belabor the architecture analogies, but the space between the “what” and “how” can sometimes feel like a wide one. Therefore, the Graduated



Understandings (GUs) serve as a bridge between the two. The GUs provide educators with an easily interpreted, visual representation of the areas of curricular emphasis within and across grades using color-coded charts. They help to promote teacher understanding of and student movement toward the CCSS by reflecting the LPs within and across grades. They also articulate the learning targets and related instructional content as well as “drill down” to provide suggested instructional strategies, scaffolds, and supports.

The GUs are comprised of two components: Instructional Families and Element Cards. The Instructional Families are on the “what” side of the conversation. They articulate the big ideas

and related instructional content and provide a structure for teachers that articulate emphasized content within and across grades. Different views show the relationship between the CCCs and the Instructional Families, the learning targets, and the CCSS by grade or grade span. The Element Cards address the “how.” They offer essential understandings for content for the CCCs at each grade level that can be measured and observed for use in reaching the instructional target as well as for formative and summative assessment development.

The GUs promote the use of a common language to describe how students with the most significant cognitive disabilities learn and interact with content. Teachers can use them to plan multi-grade instruction for students with a wide range of abilities, support developed UDL units, and foster collaborative discussions and delivery of instruction with general education teachers, support staff, and related service providers, who are like co-contractors. Many of the materials just described are still in the draft, review, or piloting stages. The NCSC trainers and your state leads will keep you updated.

One last analogy - the summative assessment resulting from the work of the NCSC GSEG will serve as the building



inspectors. It will ensure all of the materials, resources, tools, features, etc. are in place and “up to code.” The assessment will serve as the final “check,” making sure that the students have access to high quality, academic instruction and are achieving at increasingly

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higher levels. The work of the CoP members and the NCSC grant staff will culminate in nationwide communities that are comprised of unique individuals and are held together by a common infrastructure and its well-planned supports.

Looking at the CCSS and ELA

Perhaps one of the strongest features of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts (ELA) is the acknowledgement of the different components that ELA encompasses. The CCSS for ELA are broken down into standards for literature, informational texts, foundational skills, writing, speaking and listening, language, and cross-curriculum literacy. This broadened definition of what ELA is, how it should be approached across grades and grade bands, and its importance in college and career preparedness provides a more rigorous, albeit more clearly landscaped, approach to ELA.

The Introduction to these standards states, "...the Standards lay out a vision of what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century," (page 3) and the Key Design Considerations state, "...the processes of communication are closely connected" and "To be ready for college, workforce training, and life in a technological society, students need the ability to gather, comprehend, evaluate, synthesize, and report on information and ideas, to conduct original research in order to answer questions or solve problems, and to

analyze and create a high volume and extensive range of print and non-print texts in media forms old and new" (page 4).

Notice how the Key Design Considerations essentially calls the components of ELA "processes of communication." While NCSC has made a clear distinction between "language" and "communication," the CCSS for ELA point to the importance of establishing communication systems for students with complex support needs so that they, too, can navigate the waters of literacy. Perhaps, it would be more fitting to think of ELA as "English Communication Arts."

That said, as you continue to familiarize yourself with the CCSS for ELA, keep in mind that for as much as the CCSS cover, there are a number of aspects they do not cover, as listed on page 6 of the CCSS document.

Your participation in your state's Community of Practice as part of the NCSC GSEG is a means for you to learn how to address those intervention methods and

The Standards set grade-specific standards but do not define the intervention methods or materials necessary to support students who are well below or well above grade-level expectations However, the standards do provide clear signposts along the way to the goal of college and career readiness for all students It is also beyond the scope of the Standards to define the full range of supports appropriate for English Language learners and for students with special needs all students must have the opportunity to learn and meet the same high standards if they are to access the knowledge and skills necessary in their post-high school lives (Page 6).

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materials and to provide the appropriate supports for students in order to provide instruction based on the CCSS. It is important for you to know how the CCSS for ELA are organized and how the content flows across grades and grade bands as you consider your students' communication needs and plan ways to help your student access the general curriculum.

Reference:

<https://www.corestandards.org>

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers (2010). *Common Core State Standards English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*. National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington D.C.

Recommendations for You

Below are several literacy resources that you may find helpful.

David McNaughton and Janice Light from Penn State

<http://aacliteracy.psu.edu/>

The Center for Literacy and Disability Studies

<http://www.med.unc.edu/ahs/clds>

The Texas School for the Blind - Paths to Literacy

<http://www.pathstoliteracy.org/general-literacy>

SET, Special Education Technology of British Columbia (includes "Literacy Activities With Students Using AAC Devices")

<http://www.setbc.org/default.html>

Communication Corner

Motivating and *meaningful* are two key concepts to remember when programming words into your students' AAC devices. Whether programming a switch with a simple word or phrase or a complex, multi-page device, the words must be motivating and meaningful to the student. Often, words and phrases that we think are important are chosen. We may fail to consider what holds value for the *student*. When a word is meaningful to the student, he or she will be much more motivated to use the device to communicate personal wants and needs.

Remember Shelly from the orientation meeting last year? She wanted to have someone push her wheelchair so she could go for a ride. Her simple switch was programmed with the word "more" so she could ask for another ride. The word "more" was highly motivating to Shelly and meaningful. She was motivated to activate the switch because she enjoyed the activity.

Often, we program a student's devices with words that have no motivation and are not meaningful. "Good morning," "bathroom," "drink," and "eat," are common words that adults choose because the words are considered to have important social, life, or safety implications. Communicating one's basics needs *is* critical. After all, students need to be competent communicators to be active participants in social settings, to be able to

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make choices, and to let us know when they are tired, scared, or ill.

However, few of us would consider using the bathroom as the most exciting activity in our day. It is so *CRITICAL* for kids to leave school with a communication system that supports the student's ability to share a thought or an idea, a joke or secret with a friend, or comment on something "awesome," as well as to ask for help/communicate one's basic needs.

When programming a student's communication device, consider what the student likes. Does she like music? Does he like comic books? What is the student's favorite TV show? The general word "music" may not be motivating or meaningful to a student. "Music" may need to be more specific, such as "Taylor Swift" instead of music or "The Incredible Hulk" instead of comic book. To make matters even more complicated, what motivates a student today may not motivate a student tomorrow.

Teaching a student to use a communication device takes time and patience, and it can be frustrating when a student doesn't make the progress we hope or expect. However, with careful thought to what a student finds motivating and meaningful, all students *can* become competent communicators.

We Need Your Input!

The *Communication Points* newsletter is intended for our CoP members. The staff members at NCSC strive to bring you informative and entertaining articles about the grant in general, the work we are doing together, and communication tips to try in your classrooms. We encourage you to share the newsletter with your colleagues; it's a great tool to explain to others what you are doing!

We also want to bring you information on topics about which you most want to learn. Do you need more information on specific resources? Do you want to know about applications for that new iPad? Do you need resources for teaching content related to the CCSS? Please contact your UKY trainer or mindy.roden@uky.edu so that we can tailor the newsletter to best suit your needs.

Additionally, since CoPs are about learning together, we highly encourage you to submit your own article on a topic that holds particular interest to you. We want to learn from you!

Together, we can learn about the best ways to teach academic content to students with intellectual disabilities, so our students are college, career, and community ready!

A Great Big Thank YOU!

The NCSC grant staff wants to take this opportunity to thank all CoP members for their commitment and dedication. Without our CoP members, this work would not be possible. With work, family, IEPs, and staff meetings, we know that all of you are very busy. We appreciate everything you do every day for your students. Have a safe and wonderful holiday season, and we look forward to sharing our next newsletter with you in the new-year.



Voices from the Field

The contents of "Voices from the Field" represent the view of the author and are not endorsed by the staff at the National Center and State Collaborative, the Office of Special Education Programs, or the state supporting the CoP member. The contents of this newsletter were developed under a grant from the Department of Education (PR/Award #: H373X100002, Project Officer, Susan.Weigert@Ed.gov). The contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education and no assumption of endorsement by the Federal government should be made.

From Behavior to Communication,

submitted
by Cindy Collins, Wyoming

Levi is a student with autism. At the time I met him, he had no speech and a new 1:1 teacher had been hired to work with him as a last ditch effort before the district placed him in residential care. It was January of his fourth grade year. His behaviors included head butting, biting, kicking, and destroying classrooms. No one had attempted any academic work with him; all effort was on managing behaviors. His new teacher was gifted in working with behavioral issues in students like Levi, and she was systematically getting control of his behaviors when we met.

Because Levi's new teacher had been hired in November, she had not gone through the state training for administering the alternate assessment and was not allowed to give it. My special education director asked if I would be willing to step-in and administer the test to Levi with his new teacher as a second scorer. No one felt Levi could do "anything" on the assessment. We had a short period of time to do some teaching, but I used what I learned in Project Mastery and through the National Board Certification process to set up some basic tasks for his teacher to try. These tasks involved recognizing his name and simple words as well as matching simple colors and

numbers. Levi's teacher began to build academic time into his schedule each day. When the time came to complete the alternate assessment, everyone was amazed at the progress Levi had made. This past year, he scored at the basic level in reading and math.

This year as a sixth grader, Levi is much more independent. He attends a regular P.E. class several days a week and plays dodge ball and lacrosse with his peers. He counts to 20 and matches words to numbers. He knows approximately 75 sight words and is starting to identify and match coins. He goes to the cafeteria with his peers and independently gets his lunch, punches in his 5-digit passcode, sits in the noisy cafeteria, and puts away his tray. He now transitions throughout the school independently and uses a modified locker. While still not at grade level, he has made real progress.

Some days, Levi's behaviors still get in the way of academic tasks. We did not wave a magic wand and wipe away his severe disability. We did, however, open-up a world that includes time with his peers, the possibility of reading and enjoying text, handling money, and learning to navigate his community independently someday. Who knows what other opportunities may open-up for him? We just have to keep opening doors.

Do you have a success story you would like to share? Please contact your trainer or Mindy Roden at mindy.roden@uky.edu for submission instructions.

