

For my unit design project this quarter, I am planning to develop a unit connected to reading, utilizing our Wonders curriculum as my primary resource. This ELA curriculum was adopted by our district last year and is supposed to be used to teach reading and writing. Although there are elements of the curriculum that I really enjoy, I found my first year of using it to meet the new Common Core State Standards for reading and writing rather frustrating and even a bit discouraging. My goal is that through my work in this course, I will be able to develop a strong opening unit to start the school year this fall and, hopefully, develop a blueprint for moving forward with teaching reading and writing over the course of the entire school year.

As mentioned, I found the Wonders curriculum to have some elements of strength and weakness. What I enjoy most about the curriculum is its wide variety of strong texts, both in the Readers and Writers Workshop book and the Literature Anthology. The curriculum provides a balance of both literary and informative texts that captured the interests of my students last year. The texts are complex in content and structure, introducing excellent topics for discussion and strong vocabulary throughout each story. I particularly enjoy using the workshop book because it includes short passages connected with skill practice that are helpful in teaching students important comprehension skills/strategies through mini lessons. The workshop book also includes grammar practice which is a wonderful resource to have available. In terms of weaknesses, the biggest frustration I found with the curriculum is the way in which the lessons are organized and structured. As my teammates and I worked through the curriculum this past year, we found ourselves frustrated with how often the lessons jumped around between standards for the three main areas addressed in the CCSS (key ideas/details, craft structure, integration of knowledge). We all felt that students would just begin to get the hang of a skill related to a specific standard and then the curriculum would move on to something else, taking too long to spiral back again. The structure/design of the daily lessons also became very repetitive and we all found our students losing interest as the year progressed.

Since we just completed our first year with this particular curriculum, I'm not certain how effective it is with students. I think that if the curriculum is used as a tool to be pulled apart and teachers redesign the order in which lessons are taught so that students are able to get focused, concentrated time on the skills related to each standard it could be

highly effective. But, I'm not certain that in the way the program is laid out currently it is as effective as it could be. This is one of the main reasons I am excited to play around with the curriculum this summer.

My opinion on the curriculum's effectiveness is based upon the growth my students made this past year while using this curriculum as compared to previous years using other methods to teach reading. Based on monthly data collection and meetings with my grade-level team, we noted a lot of inconsistency in individual student growth. We concluded that the curriculum might be more effective if we redesigned the order of the lessons so we could really hit hard each CCSS for reading. We noticed that the reading standards seem to increase in difficulty as you work through them, so we believe that if we focus on developing the skills connected to each standard in a more sequential order, folding in each standard as the year progresses, we may find greater success in meeting the needs of our students.

Based on the work I did with this curriculum last year, it seems to be very tightly aligned to the reading CCSS, but the curriculum appears to be lacking when it comes to meeting the CCSS for writing. It is my understanding that the Wonders curriculum is supposed to be used to meet the CCSS for writing, but it really needs to be supplemented with other curriculums such as Step Up to Writing.

The daily lessons within the curriculum encourage a lot of small and whole group discussion and interaction, but lacks in the variety of ways students may engage thus becoming too routine and monotonous. I think my school's work with drama infusion will be very helpful in finding ways to take the prescribed curriculum and make it more varied and engaging for students.

The assessments within the curriculum are another area I found to be quite weak and do not meet the needs of CCSS or the standards-based grading approach used in our district. Many of the assessments provided by Wonders are multiple-choice assessments with very few short answer response questions. So, the district created their own standard-based assessments for each unit. They are strong assessments, but have one huge problem in my opinion. They are far too long for unit assessments. When giving them to my students, it could take them anywhere from 2-4 hours to complete an assessment which means we spend 2-3 days taking a single unit assessment.

I do recognize that both the Wonders curriculum and the Common Core State Standards are both very new to me as an educator and I have a lot to learn with regards to both the curriculum and new standards. This is one of the driving forces behind my choosing this subject and curriculum to work with during this class. I am eager to increase my knowledge and understanding of both the curriculum and CCSS and hope to walk into my classroom in the fall feeling more confident and comfortable with teaching literacy to my students.