

Book Review



Quality reading instruction in the age of Common Core Standards. Susan B. Neuman and Linda B. Gambrell. (Eds.). 2013. Newark, DE: International Reading Association. 288 pages. Paperback. ISBN-13: 978-0-87207-496-5. U.S. \$35.95/\$7.50 per chapter

Reviewed by

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In *Quality Reading Instruction in the Age of Common Core Standards*, editors Susan Neuman and Linda Gambrell have assembled literacy experts to investigate the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Neuman and Gambrell begin by considering what are the “challenges and opportunities” (p. 1) as the nation moves forward with the CCSS. Sixteen subsequent chapters, written by authors with expertise in specific areas, explore this question through a variety of lenses. For example, Dr. Alfred Tatum, known for his research with African American boys, writes a chapter examining the CCSS and equity; Dr. Dorothy Strickland, noted scholar in early childhood education, has a chapter on connections between the CCSS and early literacy research; and Dr. Donald Leu, leading researcher in new literacies, writes with colleagues about online research and comprehension within the context of CCSS implementation. Chapters stand alone and can be purchased individually in electronic format from the International Reading Association website <http://www.reading.org/general/Publications/Books/bk496.aspx>.

This volume comes at a critical time, when the CCSS are being widely implemented and assessments and curricula are being developed. Each topical chapter examines the CCSS and its implementation with a summary of relevant research. In addition, authors provide background information on the CCSS as well as practical implementation suggestions in the *Try This!* section of each chapter. Four major areas are addressed across several chapters: early childhood, diverse learners, texts and text complexity, and technology.

Early Childhood and the CCSS

Dorothy Strickland, Lesley Mandel Morrow, and Erin Kramer discuss young children and the CCSS. Strickland describes five aspects of the CCSS that need to be considered when teaching children from preschool to grade three. For example, she begins by articulating the CCSS emphasis on an “integrated model of literacy” (p. 15). After a brief summary of this point, Strickland suggests “supportive policy and practice” and “research” (cf. p. 18) that needs to be conducted to improve our understandings in this area. For example, she suggests that the CCSS focus on using grade level texts will need to be accompanied by providing teachers with texts and professional development. Researchers can examine what texts teachers use and the skills teachers need to teach with grade level texts. Strickland ends her chapter by making connections between the CCSS and current and past trends in early childhood education.

While Strickland articulates the larger themes and connections in the standards overall, Morrow and Kramer focus more on illuminating specific standards for speaking, listening, and language for children from kindergarten to second grade. Classroom vignettes are provided to illustrate using the standards while teaching young children. The information presented in both chapters will be useful for early childhood professionals as they move forward with a developmentally appropriate approach to the CCSS.

Diverse Learners and the CCSS

Through focusing on different demographic subgroups in each of their distinct chapters, Alfred Tatum, Theresa Roberts, Anne McGill-Franzen and Kandy Smith, and Rebecca Silverman and Brie Doyle collectively agree on a set of conditions needed in order to understand and implement the CCSS in a way that can be effective and beneficial to students of all abilities, regardless of cultural or linguistic background.

The authors purport that there is a need to place the standards within an immediate context (i.e., classrooms, schools, communities), as well as a larger social and historical context. For example, Roberts acknowledges the shared responsibilities of students, teachers, schools, and families to move English Learners (ELs) from what is termed by some as *at risk* to what she refers to as “at promise” (p. 90). Silverman and Doyle extend this argument by noting that although bilingual students may have an advantage over monolingual learners due to cognitive flexibility, this is often only realized if EL students experience a school culture that values their cultural background. Tatum discusses the need to consider the CCSS as part of an overall narrative of literacy instruction, particularly one that has historically underserved African American males. He cautions that the CCSS may not provide a move forward for this population if standards are not fully contextualized and understood by teachers and other school personnel. Similarly, McGill-Franzen and Smith recommend readers look to past successes and failures of remedial interventions when planning how to position

Response to Intervention (RTI) in a way that will truly help educators meet the challenges set forth by the CCSS.

Within each chapter, authors emphasize the crucial role of the teacher in the implementation of the CCSS in order for students who are traditionally underserved or marginalized based on their abilities or cultural and linguistic identities to succeed. Tatum calls for teachers to adopt the CCSS with a broad view of literacy rather than interpreting calls for increased text complexity and close reading as neatly measurable outcomes or items on a checklist. Roberts reminds teachers to apply their knowledge of research-based practices for EL students instead of being distracted by myths and popular misconceptions of language and the CCSS. Furthermore, according to McGill-Franzen and Smith, teachers' depth of knowledge in their content as well as with their understanding of individual students must be part of the equation for RTI to work in conjunction with the CCSS, and not as a packaged program or script as it has been widely misinterpreted to be. Each chapter addressing diverse learners offers a critique regarding elements not included or explicitly stated in the standards themselves, further emphasizing the need for teachers to customize instruction for their students. To provide readers with guiding tools, critiques are accompanied by specific recommendations, with some including research-based practices and sample lessons.

Text, Text Complexity, and the CCSS

James Cunningham, Juliet Halladay and Nell Duke, John Guthrie and Jennifer McPeake, and Elfrieda Hiebert frame their discussions of texts and text complexity in the context of past research and best practice. Halladay and Duke provide an overview of the informational text standards for reading and writing. They also share five key research studies and discuss how related K-5 teaching strategies such as collaborative strategic reading and Concept Oriented Reading Instruction align with the new standards. Extending the discussion of engagement with text, John Guthrie and Jennifer McPeake remind readers that without motivation to read, students will not be willing to take up the challenge of complex informational texts.

In his chapter on text complexity, Cunningham critically examines three major shifts in reading instruction: the use of more difficult texts, learning from text instruction rather than comprehension instruction, and a focus on text dependent questions and tasks. For each change, Cunningham points out relevant research then gives recommendations for educators to follow until more research is done. In the next chapter, Hiebert offers instructional recommendations in her targeted, in-depth look at the role of vocabulary in determining text complexity.

Technology and the CCSS

Technology in the classroom and new digital literacies are themes explored by Marilyn Jager Adams, Donald J. Leu et al., Roskos, and Daisy Smeets and Adriana Bus. Leu and his colleagues list the five processes of online research and postulate that higher level thinking skills are essential to online research as students are asked to

evaluate online sources and content. Readers will find the discussion of assessments currently in development particularly helpful as they implement the new standards. Examples are provided in four key areas: locating information, evaluating information, synthesizing information, and communicating information.

In their complementary chapters on electronic books, Kathleen Roskos and Daisy Smeets and Adriana Bus address the use of technology in the primary classroom. E-books may be an effective tool to help students meet the CCSS through shared reading, according to Roskos, but she cautions that effective e-book use requires teachers to evaluate the design, including format, interactive features, and ease of use, in addition to the quality of the literature. Smeets and Bus offer help to educators evaluating e-books with an in-depth look at common e-book interactive features (e.g., animated illustrations, sound effects, music, highlighting print) and consider how each can enhance or detract from literacy instruction.

While the above chapters focus on helping students meet digital literacy standards embedded in the CCSS, Adams stresses the importance of technology in the age of CCSS. This chapter includes examples of technologies that, if developed, would increase efficiency in teaching the new standards and a recommended list of technologies for classrooms.

Conclusion

Echoing a theme throughout the book, D. Ray Reutzel writes that CCSS implementation is “fundamentally dependent on the knowledge and effectiveness of literacy instruction offered by individual educational practitioners in the classroom” (p. 59), and resonant to the preceding chapters, David Pearson writes in closing that the strength of the “research foundations” and the “likelihood of high-fidelity implementation” (p. 237) of the CCSS range from strong to weak. *Quality Reading Instruction* challenges advanced college students, new researchers, and experienced practitioners to carefully consider discrepancies between research, best practices, and the CCSS and to close any gaps as we move forward with the Common Core State Standards.

About the Reviewers



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