



Foreword

Over the past year or two I've read far too many books and articles about the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). With all that reading I now have read two books that give me hope that the CCSS may improve both teaching and learning, especially for struggling readers and writers. This book, written by ReLeah Cossett Lent and Barry Gilmore, is one of those two books (the other was written by Lucy Calkins and her colleagues).

What has worried me about the CCSS, and most of the material I've read on the CCSS, is that there are folks who seem to interpret the message of the CCSS as doing what we have been doing while replacing current texts with more complex texts. One thing we know for sure is that giving struggling readers difficult text is no solution.

I live and work in a textbook adoption state, and this year has seen schools across the state replacing their commercial reading programs with newer commercial reading programs—new programs with “CCSS compliant” printed across the covers of the teacher manuals! However, these new programs typically present the old one-size-fits-all lesson design.

Too many people reading the CCSS documents seem not to have noticed the emphasis on problem-based learning, the emphasis on differentiated instruction, the emphasis on reading multiple texts, and the emphasis on wide and independent reading. Take, for example, this quote from the Publishers' Criteria for Common Core State Standards (Coleman & Pimentel, 2012, p. 4):

Students need access to a wide range of materials on a variety of topics and genres both in their classrooms and in their school libraries to ensure that they have opportunities to independently read broadly and widely to build their knowledge, experience, and joy in reading.

What seems clear to me, and to ReLeah and Barry, is that implementing the CCSS will require much more than simply purchasing a new one-size-fits-all commercial curriculum package.

It is not just the CCSS expectation that students will be reading and writing much more frequently than is the case today, but that they will be reading and writing for personal reasons, not just for reasons a teacher has set for them. CCSS practitioners envision classrooms where students engage each other in literate conversations about what they have been reading and writing—classrooms where students don't just learn a few basic skills but acquire the proficiencies necessary to become literate and engaged citizens.

In this small book the authors provide a clear view of what CCSS classrooms might look and sound like. They provide examples of student work and lesson plans from a variety of teachers working in a variety of schools across the nation. The point that is driven home so succinctly in this book is that the CCSS may stimulate many more teachers to do exceptionally well, as do the exemplary teachers described here.

However, as the authors note, simply giving struggling readers more complex texts and more complex assignments will be more likely to drive them toward dropping out. The examples provided of the differentiated work that struggling readers might be doing in CCSS-guided classrooms, coupled with the sorts of growth these students exhibit when the lessons fit them, offer a sharp contrast to too much of what now passes as CCSS-informed instruction.

So, read this book and then begin to adapt your instruction in the manner described so artfully by its authors. If more classrooms begin to look like the classrooms offered here, it will be a good thing for American students and for the ultimate goal of improving the literacy proficiencies of all of our students.

—Richard L. Allington
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