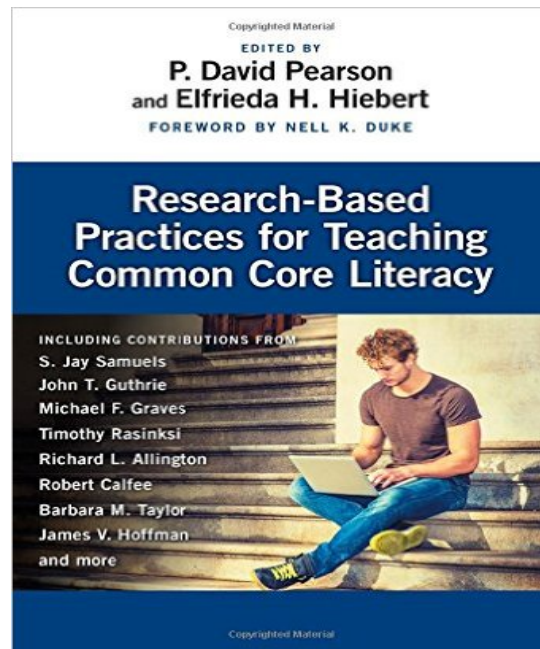# JoLLE@UGA®
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Review of *Research-Based Practices for Teaching Common Core Literacy*

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While current shifts in education emphasize positivistic practices such as standardized testing, Common Core State Standards, and scripted literacy programs, educational leaders are left wondering how these practices fit into the well established field of literacy research. *Research-Based Practices for the Teaching Common Core Literacy* (Pearson & Hiebert, 2015) assembles 14 chapters from prolific researchers across the field of literacy education to provide an overview of the past 50 years of literacy research, analyze the ways in which the Common Core Standards support or contradict this research, and discuss implications for teachers, teacher educators, and researchers. As stated in their forward, Pearson and Hiebert's (2015) hope for this text is to "summarize and curate knowledge in our field," provide a "context for learning and reflection," and "inspire others to continue [the] tradition of curating knowledge" (p. xii). The chapters are divided into three aspects of literacy research: frameworks, content, and context. This review follows the outline of the book and provides a brief overview of each chapter, followed by a critique of the overall text.

Part I: Processes and Frameworks

Pearson and Cervetti (2015) begin by providing a history of reading comprehension that includes theoretical perspectives from Thorndike (1910), Gardner (1985), Rosenblatt (1968), Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984), and Vygotsky (1978) to name a few. Thus, the reader gets a taste of theoretical frameworks such as connectionism, multiple intelligences, reader response, critical literacy, and sociocultural theory. Explanations of particular models such as the RAND Model (2002) and the framework developed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAGB, 2008) are described, and the influence of these models on the development of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are brought to light. The chapter concludes with predictions about future literacy frameworks, as well as implications for schools and classrooms.

In Chapter 2, Kapinus and Long (2015) provide an extensive history of the educational policies that have shaped literacy education in the U.S. from 1965 to today, including an overview of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Reading Excellence Act, No Child Left Behind, and the CCSS. This chapter specifically addresses the ways in which assessment has been adjusted by federal policy and provides some critical thoughts for the future including current challenges and frustrations with policy.

Kamil (2015) continues the analysis of CCSS by applying some of the models discussed in Chapter 1 as they relate to current educational policies. In reviewing the numerous literacy models that have been adapted over the years, concepts such as decoding, automaticity, and balanced literacies are explored, specifically with the Common Core Standards in mind. Kamil (2015) articulates the numerous strengths of the CCSS for current literacy teachers, but also discusses the limitations and ways in which they can be improved upon. The chapter finishes with a discussion of implications for teachers and exposes which models CCSS specifically rely upon.

Finally, Horowitz (2015) completes the first section by emphasizing the importance, and often overlooked significance, of oral language in the development of literacy skills. The overview of research includes the work of Bernstein (1971), Heath (1982), Hart and Risley (1995), and many others. These theoretical perspectives analyze the differences in language across multiple economic environments. Throughout the chapter, Horowitz (2015) discusses the implications of oral language in listening and reading comprehension, the connection between academic language and school success, the role of argumentation in literacy, and the importance of talking about texts as a part of comprehension. The chapter ends with a discussion of how to apply the CCSS through an oral language perspective, and details both successes and shortcomings within the standards.

Part II: The Content of Literacy Instruction

Chapters 5 through 10 begin with Williams' (2015) perspective on reading comprehension, which addresses the progression of comprehension theories over time from information processing through reader response theory. The CCSS address reading comprehension and critical thinking more than any other standards have before, but challenges still exist for schools, such as the introduction of more complex texts for students already by struggling to read and the emphasis on close reading. Williams (2015) provides helpful recommendations for teachers, including focusing on themes, helping students identify different text structures, and emphasizing comprehension from the very beginning of reading instruction.

Blanchard and Samuels (2015) take Williams' (2015) work one step further by considering the multiple resources from which the CCSS require students to make connections. Although the concept of multiple-source reading comprehension is not a novel approach to teaching, the CCSS are the first set of standards to include the comprehension of multiple "texts" throughout all grade levels. Blanchard and Samuels (2015) specifically address the reading, writing, and speaking/listening standards of elementary, middle, and high school students, and provide sample assessment practices for each age group, which could be helpful to teachers, teacher educators, and administrators alike. They conclude with a constructivist theoretical perspective and implore educators to consider the many sources students can gain information from beyond books.

Guthrie's (2015) chapter takes a look at the cognitive capabilities and motivations of students in grades 3, 5, and 7, in order to break down appropriate goals for each developmental benchmark and focus on which skills are most beneficial for students to develop based on current research. In addition to narrowing in on each of the aforementioned grade levels, Guthrie (2015) also examines the progressions of cognition and motivation over time and connects

these skills to the CCSS, which target distinct goals and add complexities year after year.

Chapter 8 discusses the significance of vocabulary development and how this connects to college and career readiness, the primary goal of the CCSS. Graves (2015) analyzes what has been learned about vocabulary development over the past 50 years, describes how this knowledge has shaped current practices, and argues how these practices could better reflect what we know. The four-part framework employed by Graves (2015) encourages teachers to provide rich language experiences for students, focus on individual words, teach word-learning strategies, and foster word consciousness. This chapter recognizes the current challenges with vocabulary instruction in classrooms and in doing research, but calls on the educational community to continue to learn about and foster extensive vocabularies in students.

In Chapter 9, Rasinski, Paige, and Nageldinger (2015) argue for the inclusion of reading fluency as an integral component to any literacy curriculum. After a literature review demonstrating what fluency is according to researchers, discussions as to why fluency is often neglected and when fluency should be taught are suggested. Rasinski, Paige, and Nageldinger (2015) propose "promising practices" for teaching fluency including modeling, assisted reading, and phrasing to name a few (p. 148). Finally, the chapter is summed up with how to assess fluency and considerations for the classroom.

Allington, Billen, and McCuiston (2015) address current research on reading volume and how CCSS may impact the amount of material students are reading. Although research shows the value of independent sustained reading in the classroom, due to the vast amount of information teachers are required to cover with limited instructional time, many classrooms do not provide students with adequate time to participate in reading. Allington, Billen, and McCuiston (2015) point to the CCSS's neglect of the connection between reading proficiently and sustained reading practices. This

chapter addresses the reading foundations, text selection, and tasks for all grade levels, and recommends practices which encourage students to read larger volumes of materials.

Part II finishes with a look at formative assessments from Calfree, Kapunis, and Wilson (2015), who argue that formative assessments are an integral component to best using the CCSS, when used thoughtfully and purposefully. A model is presented which unites an inquiry-based approach and formative assessment and can be applied in four different ways throughout the school year: moment by moment, daily or weekly, throughout a unit, or at the end of a quarter or year. Calfree, Kapunis, and Wilson (2015) remind readers that formative assessments are much more involved than tests and are continuous and cyclical in nature for any learner.

Part III: The Context of Literacy Instruction

Taylor (2015) begins the last section by presenting research on school-wide reforms that focus on student's literacy abilities and closing the achievement gap. In addition to providing an overview of current initiatives in schools, Taylor (2015) focuses most on practices that can be adopted school-wide that foster literacy and effective teaching of reading. She particularly addresses strategies high-poverty schools should employ such as consistent use of data on student performance and strong teacher collaboration, and goes onto describe ways in which administrations can support both the larger organization of the school and individual teachers.

Chapter 13 address the ways in which texts used in reading instruction have changed over time and have adapted based on differing theoretical frameworks, federal policies, and teaching practices. Hiebert and Martin (2015) provide a compelling comparison of texts from 1968 and 2008 and demonstrate how the expectations for beginning readers has increased in complexity over time, which is supported by the CCSS. Suggestions for teachers both in selecting texts and in the ways in

which reading is taught are provided at the end of the chapter.

The final chapter of the book investigates the concept of trust with regard to both teachers and educational programs. After analyzing the history of trust in education throughout five different contexts, Hoffman and Pearson (2015) argue that although the debate has historically posited trusting teachers or programs opposite each other, perhaps the field of education should trust both teachers and programs equally. In the end, Hoffman and Pearson (2015) express frustration with the current accountability measures and the lack of improvement they have witnessed over the past 30 years, but are hopeful that the next generation can design a new way of doing school, which involves trusting teachers as well as programs to continue to make progress in the field of literacy.

Critical Review

"At this time of major transition, we, as reading researchers and educators, should make sure that we do not discard ideas and practices that have, in fact, been effective" (Williams, 2015, p. 84). This book achieves what the authors set out to do, which is to present a condensed history of literacy education, and integrate what research has shown to be effective with the Common Core State Standards. This book touched on many of the literacy concepts, theories, and debates that continue to circulate around reading education classes and programs, and overall is a great introduction to the field. As a former Early Childhood education teacher, a current instructor of Reading Instruction and Assessments for pre-service teachers, and a reading education researcher, I found this book to be useful for budding teachers trying to grasp the relationship between standards and research, and researchers who may not have personally experienced Common Core State Standards.

However, although this book was informative, it read like a textbook and was not as user-friendly as it could be. Many of the chapters seemed to stem

from an educational psychology background, and did not address the overall intricacies within the field of teaching one would expect. For example, the use of literacy instruction in combination with other subject areas and how to establish literacy practices in a classroom were both ignored. The book is a useful introduction; however, due to the limited space allotted for each chapter, it felt as if many areas were discussed broadly, but some of the nuances and complexities were ignored. Topics that might interest teachers in particular such as literacy practices with students who have limited-English proficiency, or who have learning disabilities were neglected, and literacy practices for high-poverty schools were only addressed in one chapter.

The audience of this book was challenging to determine; it seems as if this book was written with teacher educators, researchers, and administrators in mind more than teachers, as often the implications for the classroom or the literacy practices proposed were brief and provided little detail. Also, as the book was published in 2015, some of the chapters felt a bit dated and less novel. Some states implemented the CCSS in 2011, and as such have already negotiated for themselves how these standards fit into the research of literacy practices. Teachers are living the dilemma presented in this book everyday, but many have already developed literacy practices that work well for them as they have been integrating the CCSS for five years. This book is a great resource for anyone who is still a bit unfamiliar with the CCSS, but may not be relevant to teachers already using these standards.

Overall, this book provides a useful overview, but fails to consider the dilemmas everyday literacy teachers are feeling in the classroom. The theorists, books, and models referenced are worth knowing, and the extensive bibliographies at the end of each chapter are useful resources in and of themselves. Although there is a well-developed history and a wide variety of information on literacy education provided in this book, educators have to remember that literacy practices take place in a larger context, and that these contexts contribute just as much, if

not more, to the outcomes of literacy learning. *Research-Based Practices for Teaching Common Core Literacy* (Pearson & Hiebert, 2015) provides essential pieces of information, which are helpful in developing literacy practices, but ignore some of the other pieces which make up the larger puzzle of learning to read, write, and communicate.

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