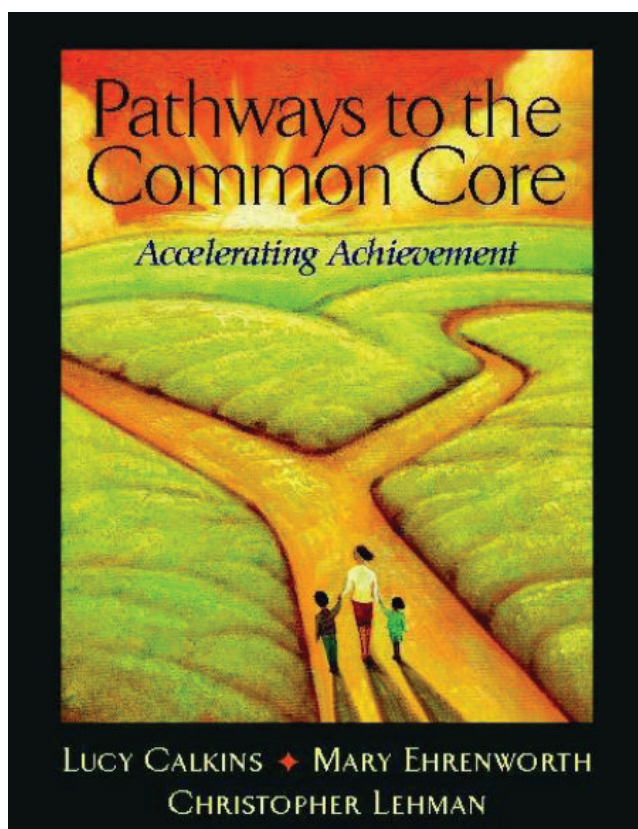


## BOOK REVIEW

Review by Bryan Rogers, James C. Enochs High School, Modesto, California



*Pathways to the Common Core:  
Accelerating Achievement*

by Lucy Calkins, Marh Ehrenworth and  
Christopher Lehman

Routledge, 224 pp.

ISBN 13: 978-0325043555

\$33.13

In her book, *Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement*, (Calkins, Ehrenworth, & Lehman, 2012) Lucy Calkins presents an overview of the possible arguments both for and against the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The prose of the introduction and discussion is lighthearted and persuasive towards viewing the CCSS as a golden opportunity, encouraging the reader to view them as a chance to rebuild and retool education modes and assessment means. The author is clear in her acknowledgement that while we may see the great opportunity of the CCSS; how it will be implemented is still an unwritten chapter in the book of modern education reform.

The adoption of the Common Core State Standards in 45 states across the nation, including the District of Columbia and four American territories, represents a large scale change in curriculum and assessment goals aimed at better preparing America's K-12 students for success in college and careers (National Governors Association, 2012). The new mandates require an increase in literacy skills for all students K-12 in every academic discipline. The guidelines of the Common Core State Standards indicate students will be assessed using adaptive testing on an open-ended response style of questioning that measures literacy mastery and the ability to explain the "correctness" of their responses on multiple topics. Students who have previously been trained and assessed on their ability to look for the best-fit answer and make educated choices will soon face a testing environment that does not match the way they have been taught or assessed previously.

This translates into a requirement for the students to adapt to new modes of content delivery, assessment, and

very likely, a completely different learning experience in a fully implemented CCSS classroom. Similarly, it is a clear change in the working environment and charges teachers to produce deeper lessons for students, with higher expectations of performance specifically connected to literacy mastery. According to Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman (2012), "...the Common Core marks a return to the kind of reading that was promoted in the thirties and forties through New Criticism. New Criticism put text at the center and equated reading with close analysis of the text" (p. 26).

The main focus of the book is on the theory and implications of three parts of the CCSS: reading standards, writing standards, and speaking and listening standards. In each of the sections the authors break down the standards and painstakingly illuminate the connections within and between the standards, as well as how each standard stacks upon the previous school years in a threaded fashion. The text in each of these sections is descriptive and at times repetitive with commentary regarding resources that can be obtained from the authors' company. In a few areas, the author seemed to be more interested in describing the difficulty only to follow up with their company's answer for how to approach the challenges of implementation.

The book is strong on explaining the relationships and rationales of each of the three standard areas discussed. The structure of each of these areas is well defined for interrelation and theory. The goal of reading for meaning and how to blend that concept into writing for meaning are developed in each section and at times the connections are very clear. They cite the research on "close reading" as a means to help students engage in the lessons for intrinsic reasons, which is common in current CCSS training sessions. The examples in the reading sections using the book *Charlotte's Web* are very good but limited to certain grade levels.

The narrative mentions a limited number of possible methods to actually apply the standards to a classroom setting and the examples that are presented are from the elementary school level. There were very few discussion pieces that give mention to high school level implementation suggestions. The implementations suggested also come from a perspective that the educator reading the book is most certainly working with a group of other teachers in collaboration. The assumption of a profession-

al learning group or team working on implementation using the book as a guide comes across as a hidden message that the task is too big for one teacher with one group of students. It would be wonderful if teamwork and consistent collaboration was the norm at every school site, but I would argue the authors' perspective on this is not a universal truth.

The authors make multiple references to purchasing new books and materials for students to read but this seems in opposition to the reality of current school budgets and the very real concern of the costs of implementing the standards and assessment pieces that they briefly cover in the introduction. In addition, the depth of study required for implementing text, reading, and speaking analysis as they suggest would be problematic with the current hours of school required for attendance, which is a largely unaddressed concern in their narrative.

The primary weakness in the book is the lack of connection between the literacy strand and all of the academic disciplines. Reading, writing, and speaking, while very important skills, are not the only academic topics covered in school and by leaving out the other disciplines in this book the authors may have missed a key area of practical need for educators.

The book concludes with a very useful and thorough discussion of the two consortia that are developing Common Core assessments, the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). The explanations of philosophy and the different style of assessment to be offered by each of these groups is well written and are quite valuable resources to address concerns about the new assessment model.

In summary, *Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement* provides a solid discussion of the theory behind the Reading, Writing, and Speaking and Listening standards. The narrative is incomplete, as it does not connect to literacy standards across all disciplines, such as mathematics, science, and social science. Educators in the elementary and 7-12 English Language Arts will find the detailed theoretical breakdowns of the standards useful in understanding the purposes, but will still be left with the question of how to implement the standards fully. The case for collaboration to address this change is assumed, but nevertheless represents what may be the only possible way for full implementation to work. Although this

book would be a good source for starting the conversation about implementation and how to adapt to CCSS instruction, it represents only one part of the story to be told in this new era of education reform.

**Further Reading**

Calkins, L., Ehrenworth, M., & Lehman, C. (2012). *Pathways to the common core: Accelerating achievement* (1st ed.). Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heineman.

National Governors Association (2012). *Common core state standards initiative: Preparing America's students for college and career*. Washington, DC: National Governors Association.

**About the Reviewer**

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