Common Core for the Not-So-Common Learner
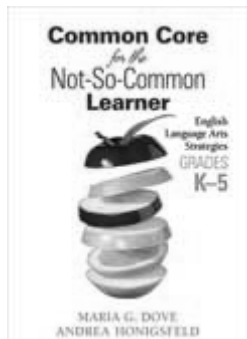
May 2015 – Volume 19, Number 1

Common Core for the Not-So-Common Learner			
Author:	Maria G. Dove & Andrea Honigsfeld (2013)		
Publisher:	SAGE Publications		
Pages	**ISBN-13**	**Price**	
207 pages	1452257825	$29.95 USD	

As diversity in U.S. classrooms grows, so too must teachers and their practices. Educators must provide a rigorous, language-rich curriculum to every student regardless of their diverse cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds. *Common Core for the Not-So-Common Learner* provides educators with the tools and resources needed to access the Common Core State Standards to make this task possible. This text is particularly helpful for teachers who work with language learners. Authors Maria Dove and Andrea Honigsfeld impart their expertise in higher education as well as years teaching English Language Learners in New York in creating this practical volume. They do not claim to provide a systematic 'how-to' manual that will give students the capability to master the CCSS (Common Core State Standards). Rather, the text helps unpack the standards, identifying an anchor standard for English Language Arts (ELA), and then providing possible strategies for teachers to use in their classrooms. The authors encourage teachers to use these strategies, adapt them to meet the needs of their students, and then reflect on results with colleagues.

The text is organized so that it is easy for the reader to access needed information quickly. After introducing the relevance between the CCSS and diverse learners, the following chapters (2-7) take a strand of the standards and provide strategies for implementation. The book closes with a chapter dedicated to strategies for collaboration. It is simple to tab pages that will be used most frequently and identify the strategies or suggested texts that are needed for each teacher.

For convenience and readability, each chapter is similarly structured. There are tables, boxes, and figures in every chapter that provide examples, possible mentor texts, and

graphic organizers to help the reader get a visual representation of a model they can easily use in their classroom. Most chapters conclude with sections that guide classroom application and teacher reflection. These are subtitled Anticipated Outcomes, Instructional Challenges, Promising Classroom Practices, and Common Core Reading Standards- Un(Common) Reflection Questions. In addition, the list of online and print key resources on the last page of every chapter is particularly helpful for the reader if further research is necessary.

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the text that establishes the framework for the rest of the reading. The authors introduce who the *Not-So-Common Learner* is and how the CCSS affect the learner. Some characteristics of the *Not-So-Common Learner* include English Learners (ELs) who are either foreign-born immigrants or US born citizens of immigrant parents who speak another language other than English (p. 3). This term also embodies students who have interrupted formal education (SIFE), students with disabilities, Nonstandard English speakers, children of poverty, and struggling learners (p. 4). What *The Common Core for the Not-So-Common Learner* addresses in chapter one is the fact that the standards are an opportunity for educators the provide content rich curriculum to all students, even those who are not yet at the proficiency level of their English speaking peers. This chapter continues to delve into the relevance of the CCSS for all learners—and why it is important for teachers to examine their own practices.

Chapter 2, Strategies for Academic Language Development, is exactly what this chapter provides. Dove and Honigsfeld explain the importance of explicit academic language instruction and then provide strategies for accomplishing academic language development. The chapter moves through the conventions of Standard English, grammar and punctuation, and figurative language. It also provides examples for reading across genres and themes. The boxes and figures that provide examples and checklists are extremely beneficial for the readers. They are literally things that teachers can use in the classroom immediately. The examples use a specific mentor text and then provide an outline for implementing certain strategies. Being new to education, I find it difficult to locate the 'perfect' mentor text. It is very helpful that there is a list in many of the chapters of *Common Core for the Not-So-Common Learner*.

Chapters 3 and 4 introduce strategies for reading both literature and informational texts. These chapters provide a frame for asking and answering higher-level thinking questions because "students' comprehension can be fostered through the asking and answering of questions before, during, and after reading." (p.42). There is a multitude of examples and graphic organizers than can be used throughout implementation of these particular standards. These chapters again break down the performance standard then provide an array of tables, boxes, and figures that show some helpful graphic organizers. These charts and organizers are filled in with samples from anchor texts, but the simplicity of them allows the readers to use the same chart with various texts. Despite being framed as either literature or non-fiction texts, the organizers and question stems can easily be manipulated to meet the needs of a particular lesson or theme. For example, Table 4.2 (p. 85) is a template that covers the text title, author's purpose, the main points, details that support the main point, text evidence, and important

vocabulary. This template is extremely rigorous and allows the teacher to know exactly with what the student is struggling. Informational texts provide so much information and it is important that students know how to pull out what they need.

Reading foundational skills are the basic things students need to know when learning to read. Some of these skills include print concepts, phonological awareness, phonics and word recognition, and fluency (p.100). These things are embedded throughout the other standards and can be taught fluidly within both informational texts and literature. In Chapter 5 of *Common Core for the Not-So-Common Learner*, reading foundational skills are addressed. The chapter pushes through each of the above mentioned skills providing strategies for teaching each skill. Some examples of strategies mentioned in this chapter include, but are not limited to: word walls, word sorts, reader's theatre, sorting, and rhyming. The chapter concludes with the familiar four subheadings- Anticipated Outcomes, Instructional Challenges, Promising Classroom Practices, and Common Core Reading Standards-(Un)Common Reflection questions.

The last two chapters move away from reading and begin to focus on listening, speaking, and writing. In Chapter 6, writing becomes the focus. Dove and Honigsfeld mention expert Lucy Calkins and her research and work in the implementation Writer's Workshop and many scaffolding techniques for teaching writing. Again, there are examples that provide various sentence frames, power paragraphs, and other promising classroom practices that allow for successful writing. The text moves to the last two language domains in Chapter 7- Speaking and Listening. In the chapter titled Speaking and Listening Strategies, the authors explore how speaking and listening improve performance amongst diverse learners. The book states "The Common Core State Standards must be used as a vehicle to provide equitable opportunities for all learners to enrich their receptive and expressive oral language skills, expand their vocabulary, and build new knowledge in literacy and content areas." (p.154). This statement provides the relevance for both embedding and explicitly teaching speaking and listening skills. Many of these skills (like foundational skills) can be taught throughout reading literature and informational texts. Some examples mentioned circle time, morning meetings, object of interest, and wordless picture books (p.169-170) that allow students to engage in purposeful talk.

Chapter 8 provides strategies that help teachers work with colleagues who are also instructing diverse learners. This might include two content teachers, the ELL teacher, or any other educator who is responsible for the education of a particular student. This chapter also contains the boxes and figures, but they are for the teacher's personal use rather than something that is given to a student.

Common Core for the Not-So-Common Learner is a practitioner-friendly text that serves as a toolkit for educators, breaking down the ELA anchor standards and providing pedagogical support to educators. It is a text that can be used for all learners and provides teachers with strategies that can easily be implemented. It is straightforward, comprehensible, and provides directives for effective teaching practices. As a teacher of EL's, I found the activities in this text to be engaging and supportive ways for me to

implement the CCSS in the classroom. I created multiple tabs throughout the text so that I can easily access particularly helpful charts and organizers. Many of the tables that I marked for personal use are generic graphic organizers and can be easily transferred between texts. I didn't flag too many specific activities. Instead, I have found that the blank organizers that are designed for student use are the most helpful in scaffolding various reading and writing activities. The organizers can be used across curriculum in both the fiction and non-fiction standards. In many cases, students just need a guide in interpreting information in a dense text and the graphic organizers provided help act as that guide for students. I have used these organizers before, during, and after reading in order to activate knowledge and then to keep students engaged throughout reading. In addition to the reading organizers, I really liked how there is a box with sentence frames for partner discussion in the chapter focused on speaking. Although the box is small and limited, it is a place to start with students and it is helpful to give to students in order to encourage meaningful conversation and partner talk.

This book, published in 2013, was introduced to education at the right time. The no-nonsense strategies are easy to implement and are easy to manipulate and change to meet the needs of a particular grade level or language proficiency level.

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