

The Main Idea's Professional Development Suggestions for *In Praise of American Educators*

I. The Literacy CCSS - The Good and the Bad

[Have teachers discuss what works and what doesn't about the Common Core standards in reading and writing](#)

At this point, most teachers are familiar with the Common Core State Standards if they have been adopted in your state. Rather than insisting that teachers follow these standards blindly, it can actually improve teaching if teachers take a critical look at the CCSS. To prepare to facilitate, read Gallagher's ideas about the good and the bad of the CCSS in Chapter 1.

In smaller groups or one large group, ask the open-ended question, "From your experience so far, what works and what doesn't work about the literacy CCSS?" After discussing a number of ideas, have someone lead a brainstorm to collect the ideas. Be sure to weave in Gallagher's thoughtful arguments from Chapter 1.

What works about the CCSS?	What doesn't work about the CCSS?

II. The Common Core Standards in Reading

[1. Have teachers share successful ideas for implementing what *does* work about the Common Core Standards in reading](#)

It is important for teachers to recognize what *works* about the Common Core reading standards and to share successful ideas for implementing these strengths. The reading standards do a good job of going beyond a surface-level understanding and bring kids through three layers of understanding—what the text *says*, what the text *does*, and what the text *means*. Have teachers discuss some of Gallagher's suggestions for addressing these areas and then share their own successful ideas.

The CC reading standards ask:	Gallagher's activities	Teachers' ideas to address these three levels of comprehension
What does the text <i>say</i> ?	Summarization activities like: 17-Word Summaries, Write a Headline, and What is Left Out	
What does the text <i>do</i> ?	Instead of asking students questions about the <i>content</i> of a text, ask what makes the text effective as an argument or what techniques elevate or strengthen the writing	
What does the text <i>mean</i> ?	Help students practice their inferential skills by providing charts and claims and other data sets or infographics, and ask them to make inferences	

[2. Have teachers explore the drawbacks of the Common Core standards in reading](#)

a. Conduct either a **silent forced choices** or **continuum activity** depending on which would work better for your teachers in order to explore problems with the Common Core reading standards that may need to be addressed. As the facilitator, state the two opposing options in the chart below (for example, "Go to the wall with the door if you believe students should stay 'within the four corners of the text' when reading and *not* make connections to their own lives or the outside world. Go to the opposite wall with the windows if you believe students should make connections between what they are reading and the real world.") For the *forced choices* activity, teachers must choose one side and silently walk to one wall. If you choose the *continuum* activity, teachers don't need to completely agree with either side and can choose which one they are leaning toward and stand closer to that wall. Below are the different sides:

One end of the spectrum	The other end of the spectrum
1. Readers should be confined to stay "within the four corners of the text," that is, they should not connect what they are reading with their own experiences and the outside world.	1. Readers should NOT be confined to stay "within the four corners of the text." They SHOULD connect texts to the outside world.
2. Prereading activities are undervalued. We can't just drop a text into students' hands and expect them to absorb it "on its own terms."	2. Prereading activities are overused. More often, we need to hand students a text and expect them to encounter it "on its own terms."
3. Recreational reading is all but ignored in the CCSS and therefore should not be a regular part of the ELA classroom.	3. Although recreational reading is practically ignored in the CCSS, we should include it in ELA because students need to read a lot to improve.
4. The CCSS have here no reading targets for how much time students should be reading so we don't need to set any targets.	4. Although the CCSS do not state how much time students should be reading, we want students to read a lot so we should set targets.
5. The CC reading standards may be developmentally inappropriate.	5. The CC reading standards are developmentally appropriate.
6. English teachers should NOT be cutting down on literary reading to provide more time for nonfiction reading.	6. English teachers <u>should</u> be cutting down on literary reading to provide more time for nonfiction reading.
7. The CCSS overemphasize the teaching of excerpts. Teachers should replace the reading of longer texts/novels with more excerpts.	7. Although the CCSS emphasize the teaching of excerpts, English teachers should not completely replace longer texts and novels with shorter excerpts.

b. Read and Discuss: After doing the above activity in complete silence, have teachers go back and read Chapter 3 or the summary of Chapter 3 which outlines Gallagher’s concerns about the Common Core standards in reading. Then choose a few of the concerns in the chart above to discuss with teachers. (As a bonus, use the Poker Chip approach, described below, to conduct this discussion!)

III. The Common Core Standards in *Writing*

1. Have teachers share successful ideas for implementing what *does* work about the Common Core Standards in *writing*

Gallagher points out the enormous advantage of the CCSS even mentioning writing when NCLB seemed to ignore it all together! However, it is an entire workshop (or rather, PD focus for the year!) to discuss writing across the curriculum or teaching argumentative writing, so although this is a wonderful focus for your PD, it is too large to include here right now.

2. Have teachers explore the drawbacks of the Common Core standards in *writing*

a. Conduct a *forced choices* or *continuum activity* using the directions on the previous page but using the following arguments/statements about the Common Core standards in *writing*:

One end of the spectrum	The other end of the spectrum
1. Though narrative writing is one of the genres required by the CCSS, it remains undervalued. We need to teach both the reading and writing of narratives to help students develop life skills such as connecting to people through telling stories, empathy, and social skills.	1. Though narrative writing is one of the genres required by the CCSS, because it is not as valued as explanatory and argumentative writing, we should teach less of it.
2. The CCSS emphasize the big three writing discourses -- narrative, informative/explanatory, and argumentative writing – so teachers should focus on these and not introduce other forms of writing.	2. The big three writing discourses in the CCSS are too limiting. Teachers should introduce a variety of other types of writing.
3. Teachers should teach the big three writing discourses -- narrative, informative, and argumentative writing – independently of each other.	3. In real life there is no artificial separation between writing discourses so teachers should combine them when it makes writing stronger.
4. Teachers must dictate the writing curriculum because there is already so much in the CCSS.	4. Teachers must provide students with choice over topics and genres in their writing.
5. Teachers must prepare students for the CCSS exams by providing them with the same types of prompts they will see on these exams.	5. Teachers must go beyond what is asked for in the CCSS exams to have students come up with their own original theses and arguments.

b. Read and Discuss: After doing the above activity in complete silence, have teachers go back and read Chapter 5 or the summary of Chapter 5 which outlines Gallagher’s concerns about the Common Core standards in *writing*. Then choose a few of the concerns in the chart above to discuss with teachers. (As a bonus, use the Poker Chip approach, described below, to conduct this discussion!)

IV. Weaving Literacy Common Core Standards into Regular ELA Meetings

Have teachers try Gallagher’s strategies then test them out in their classes

Gallagher’s books always contain a wealth of compelling literacy strategies that he has already tried and found to be successful in his own classroom. Charge grade-level teams or the English department with choosing a few of his strategies to commit to trying in between meetings, and then reporting back at the next meeting. When teachers meet again, have them give each other suggestions for fine-tuning the strategies, and then choose the next set of exercises to implement before the following meeting.

To learn about Gallagher’s suggested literacy strategies, teachers can read Gallagher’s book or the summary of the book. If it is too much for them to digest an entire book, have them read Chapter 6 (Using Models to Improve Reading and Writing) and Chapter 7 (Listening and Speaking Skills) for ideas.

You or another designated leader could conduct the first ELA meeting with the following suggestions from Gallagher. The best way to introduce these strategies is to have teachers *actually do them the way the students would*.

From Chapter 6

Use photos, paintings, or comics to develop the ability to infer – Bring in an image – such as one of National Geographic’s most memorable photos of the year (there’s a great one on p. 150 of the book) and have teachers look at the photo and practice writing inferences for what might have happened.

Use models to revise papers – Either have teachers bring in two drafts of a student paper OR use the examples of *before* and *after* drafts in the book and make copies for teachers. (There are several examples you can use on pages 138, 141, 142, and 143.) Ask teachers to determine which draft is better and why in order to practice using models to improve revision skills.

From Chapter 7

Poker Chip Discussion – To practice getting everyone involved in a discussion, distribute three poker chips to each teacher and ask them to spend all of their chips in the following discussion. Then either discuss how effective they felt the two exercises from Chapter 6 above were OR discuss the importance of teaching speaking and listening skills regardless of whether these skills are tested.

Interrupted Book Report – Ask which teachers would feel comfortable discussing the book they are currently reading with the other teachers. Then model the use of the Interrupted Book Report by calling on those teachers to discuss their books until you interrupt them and move to another teacher to talk about her book.

V. Beyond the Common Core – A Deeper Vision of Literacy from the Leadership

With the leadership team, come up with a more powerful vision for literacy instruction at your school

In schools, leaders also feel tremendous pressure to ensure students succeed on annual exams. They, too, may inadvertently lose sight of important literacy skills. Although you may not be able to change how teacher evaluation is conducted, take a moment like Gallagher did to imagine (together with your leadership team, if possible) what you would like to see in classes and what you would emphasize in feedback conversations with teachers *if* teacher effectiveness were measured by Gallagher's four simple criteria:

1. What percentage of your students can walk into a bookstore (or visit Goodreads.com) and know where to find books that interest them?
2. What percentage of your students write without being asked to do so by a teacher?
3. What percentage of your students can stand and speak effectively and confidently in front of a group of people?
4. What percentage of your students can actively listen to others – can carefully consider both what is said and what is not said?

Think about and discuss what you would expect to see in classrooms when it comes to:

- student choice of books, writing topics, writing genres
- the availability of interesting books
- how speaking and listening are woven into class activities
- assessment practices for reading, writing, speaking, and listening