How did standardized tests, universally loathed in the field of education, become the modus operandi at the K–12 level in the United States, despite a lack of evidence of their efficacy? Addison and McGee begin *Writing and School Reform* by answering this question by familiarizing readers with the accountability movement’s historical roots: Reagan-era educational reform. The authors uncover the current major players, such as Pearson and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, what roles they play, and how they are influencing the conversation in ways heretofore unseen. Indeed, the first few chapters read like a historical exposé and will give educators an understanding of the rationale and motives behind modern educational policy trends, and where practice deviated from reformers’ intent.

After outlining the current state of affairs driven by accountability and standardized testing, the authors move to elucidate research findings relative to writing trends in high schools and colleges. While creating *Writing and School Reform*, Addison and McGee pored over educational reports and documents, compiled key information, and summarized it for educators. They make ample use of clear charts including one that synthesizes the results of several influential reports to summarize what matters most in the teaching of writing (85).

One of the strengths of *Writing and School Reform* is that it doesn’t expound excessively on policy or theory. Discussions of both are clear and concise, cutting to the heart of the issues in a way that won’t bog down readers. Chapter 3 (“What’s an Administrator or Teacher to Do?”) offers a wealth of practical advice and research-driven strategies that teachers can put to use. That advice is backed up by reputable studies that are distilled to their core findings for the educator lacking in time. These distillations are often found in list form, which can be easily bookmarked for quick reference. One list, for example, breaks down the eleven most effective approaches to improving student writing as compiled by the Carnegie Corporation via a meta-analysis of 133 studies (85–86).

*Writing and School Reform* doesn’t stop at explaining the current goals mandated by standards; it also provides data on whether or not those goals are realistic, and whether they are being reached. For example, Addison and McGee describe the state of vertical alignment from K–16 as it concerns writing instruction, rather than merely listing the mandated goal. This snapshot of the current state of writing instruction, backed up with data, research, and practical ideas for the classroom, is the kind of information that makes *Writing and School Reform* such a valuable resource for teachers.

**Common Core Supports Writing Across the Curriculum**

In general, Addison and McGee’s recommendations focus on *Writing Across the Curriculum*.
(WAC), effective and responsive instruction, and professional development. One of the things that the Common Core gets right, according to the authors, is that it weaves literacy and writing standards throughout the different subjects. This makes WAC the perfect (research-backed) method for meeting those standards, and Addison and McGee outline the characteristics and qualities of a good WAC program. When describing effective and responsive instruction, Writing and School Reform’s lists shine. Each list—for example, the list of higher order writing activities aligned with deep learning—comes from a reputable report, study, or meta-analysis and gives directives to teachers on what effective instruction looks like and how it can be implemented in the classroom (83). In regard to professional development, the authors champion teacher agency.

Chapter 5 (“Teaching Writing Matters”) concludes by exposing working conditions for both teachers and professors that leave little time for planning and collaboration. The recommendations emphasize teacher agency by calling for more planning time and professional development to position teachers as developers of curriculum. Only with a collegial working environment, the authors argue, can teachers create for themselves the quality professional development needed to improve student performance (and they cite the studies to back it up).

One weakness, if any can be found in Writing and School Reform, is that while it does attempt to bridge the divide between K–12 and higher education, there is a lack of practical measures included for teachers and professors to further that goal. The book offers a window for both teachers and professors through which to view the standards influencing the progress of students, as well as pointing out ways in which vertical alignment could be improved. While this information can serve as a starting point for collaborative efforts, little direction is given on how to create lasting partnerships and coalitions between classroom teachers and professors. When teachers and professors are given so little planning time to collaborate with their peers, maintaining meaningful communication between institutions becomes an even greater challenge—a challenge that Addison and McGee argue cannot be met unless our educational culture changes from one of testing and accountability to one of professional collaboration, agency, and collegiality. Writing and School Reform opens a dialogue to that end.

Reading Reconsidered: A Practical Guide to Rigorous Literacy Instruction
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Literacy instruction has a natural home in the English language arts classroom. However, many English teachers often seek additional, cutting-edge practices to improve literacy instruction for the benefit of struggling readers and writers. Thus, finding appropriate resources to support this critical aspect of our work in the classroom is essential.

Based on a collection of literacy instructional practices from the Uncommon Schools (a system of public charter schools), authors Lemov, Driggs, and Woolway offer Reading Reconsidered as a comprehensive guide for helping teachers approach an all-too-important aspect of literacy: the ability to comprehend, write about, and discuss text on deeper levels coupled with the ability to apply these literacy skills in any academic or professional context.

Close Reading: The “Core of the Core”

Lemov, Driggs, and Woolway begin their book with what they term the “core of the core”—an obvious reference to the Common Core State Standards for literacy, particularly focusing on the close reading of complex informational text. From there, Reading Reconsidered is organized as a series of easy-to-follow modules that offer a mixture of theoretical reflection, explanations of literacy strategies, and anecdotal evidence. Their evidence is not only described thoroughly in each module, but it is also presented via video clips featured on the DVD that accompanies the book.
In regards to text-dependent questions that require a close reading for gaining meaning, the authors emphasize the importance of question development at the syntactical level, that is, developing questions that foster students’ ability to derive meaning from the words and phrases of a complex text. In addition, through the close reading modules, English teachers receive instruction on how to teach reading for meaning at word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph levels, including the use of paraphrasing, deciphering key lines, referencing, summarizing, delineating, and finite evidence tracking (sections of a given text), as well as connotation, word patterning, and figurative and literal meanings.

Teaching Complex Texts: A Doable Approach

Perhaps most refreshing about what Lemov, Driggs, and Woolway present in Reading Reconsidered is a sensible approach to teaching text at a global level. The authors ask that English teachers consider such aspects as having students use text to identify its alignment to a specific genre (e.g., having students conduct a convention alignment analysis), intra- and intertextual discourse analyses, discussing sections or parts of a text in comparison to the whole, and pushing students to be confident readers who question the ambiguities of a text. The DVD included with Reading Reconsidered contains a total of 44 video clips featuring classroom footage of the literacy strategies. The majority of the video clips fall under the book sections on Writing for Reading, Approaches to Reading, Vocabulary, and Reading Systems. These sections are appropriately emphasized as they function as central supports for students’ literacy development.

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