

# Critical Education

Volume 4 Number 5

May 10, 2013

ISSN 1920-4125

---

## *Coring Social Studies within Corporate Education Reform*

*The Common Core State Standards, Social Justice, and the Politics of Knowledge in U.S. Schools*

Wayne Au

*University of Washington, Bothell*

Citation: Au, Wayne. (2013). *Coring social studies within corporate education reform: The Common Core State Standards, social justice, and the politics of knowledge in U.S. schools*. 4(5). Retrieved from <http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/criticaled/article/view/182278>

*This article is based upon presentations made at the American Educational Research Association 2013 Annual Meeting in San Francisco.*

### **Abstract**

*The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) have been adopted in 45 U.S. states. Driven by a wide coalition that includes the major U.S. political parties, the business elite, for-profit education corporations, cultural conservatives, and both major U.S. teachers' unions, the CCSS have mainly garnered glowing praise in mainstream U.S. media and widespread acceptance amongst political figures and public school districts nationwide. This paper undertakes a critical analysis of the origins and political tensions found within the CCSS, arguing that the CCSS will inevitably lead to restrictive high-stakes, standardized testing similar to that associated with No Child Left Behind. Further this paper specifically examines the treatment of the social studies within the context of CCSS and questions the likely outcomes of the recently drafted College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards within the current political and cultural context of the United States.*



Readers are free to copy, display, and distribute this article, as long as the work is attributed to the author(s) and *Critical Education*, it is distributed for non-commercial purposes only, and no alteration or transformation is made in the work. More details of this Creative Commons license are available from <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>. All other uses must be approved by the author(s) or *Critical Education*. *Critical Education* is published by the Institute for Critical Educational Studies and housed at the University of British Columbia. Articles are indexed by EBSCO Education Research Complete and Directory of Open Access Journals.

## 2 Critical Education

In his January of 2001 article entitled, “The Authentic Standards Movement and Its Evil Twin” (Thompson, 2001), Scott Thompson offered his lament. Thompson was a true-believer in what he termed as the Authentic Standards Movement of the 1990s. In that movement he saw the opportunity for the improvement of public education based on issues of equity and access to support for real learning. In his article, however, Thompson goes on to lament that his Authentic Standards Movement had been subverted by its evil twin, something he called the “high-stakes, standardized test-based reform” movement (358). He argued that the evil twin offered forms of standards and accountability that deviated from the original intent, and that erroneously relied on the faulty measures provided by high-stakes, standardized tests.

Thompson’s (2001) article is important because it is representative of a lot of good, honest folks who bought into the standards movement of the 1990s, but were politically naïve when it comes to understanding educational policy in the United States. Despite the good intentions of many of the players, functionally speaking the only reason a broad coalition of interests supported the standards movement of the 1990s was to use them to assess whether or not students were meeting standard. And, the only assessments that had any traction at most levels of government, the business community, mainstream and right-wing media, and in the commonsense consciousness of most of the U.S. public, are high-stakes, standardized tests of the illest sort (Au, 2009d). It would have been absolutely naïve to think that, in the context of the test-crazy United States, anything else could have come about from the standards movement of the 1990s. And so we got NCLB (Karp, 2003), at almost the exact moment Thompson (2001) published his lament.

Looking back a mere 13 years or so ago, before our unending wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, G. W. Bush was going to be the “education president” and supported a radical reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, dubbed No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Here in the U.S. we tend to have historical amnesia when it comes to NCLB, often forgetting that it was not just Bush’s law. There was instead full bi-partisan support for NCLB. Civil Rights groups had signed on, and the teachers unions were also on board. A broad coalition of support came together for NCLB, one based largely around rhetoric of closing achievement gaps and serving under-served children. As a result a business-like carrot-and-stick approach to holding public education “accountable” for raising high-stakes, standardized test scores became encoded in national law (Au, 2009d; Karp, 2003).

And we know what happened after NCLB was passed. Before NCLB only 19 states tested children every year, and afterwards all 50 did (Rethinking Schools, in press). And while the U.S. system of public education certainly had significant and persistent problems before NCLB (Ladson-Billings, 2006), all of the NCLB testing in order to meet adequate yearly progress started limiting curriculum and instruction to the tested subjects of mathematics and literacy. Low performing kids, particularly poor kids and kids of color, were seeing subjects like art, P.E., and just about anything else besides math and literacy cut out of their curriculum just to focus on test prep. Multicultural curriculum was also being pushed out of the curriculum as well. NCLB proved the age-old adage: If it isn’t test, it isn’t taught (Au, 2007, 2009d).

Where did the standards movement of the 90’s and its successor NCLB get us today? Well, a decade of high-stakes, standardized testing did not really do anything to raise achievement or close gaps in test scores (Guisbond, Neill, & Schaeffer, 2012; National Research Council, 2011). Additionally, due to a wide array of reasons, NCLB has been rhetorically denounced, left behind and remembered as one of Bush’s failed policies after the Democrats, unions, parents, and even some of the business community jumped ship (Karp, 2007/2008).

The heart of NCLB, however, lay in the logics of competition and markets of neoliberal capitalism (Au, 2009d), and that heart certainly lives on today. For instance, despite the high-minded rhetoric of Obama's 2008 campaign speeches (Au, 2009b), high-stakes, standardized testing, and the massive amounts of data it produces, remain at the center of education reform in the United States. Test score achievement is still used as the driving justification for charter schools, Teach for America, undermining teachers' unions, merit pay, and attacking public education generally. Indeed, such testing has only become more deeply entrenched through Obama's Race To The Top and the corporate education reform movement (Karp, 2010). Enter the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

### **All Aboard the NCLB Common Core Express**

According to Mathis (2010), in April of 2009, with the endorsement of representatives of the forty-one states present at the national meeting, the National Governors Association (NGA) contracted with Achieve, Inc., (Achieve, Inc., itself was founded by the NGA in 1996 after the national standards movement fell apart) to develop national standards in reading and math. As Mathis explains:

Achieve work groups met in private and the development work was conducted by persons who were not, with apparently only a single exception, K-12 educators. The work groups were staffed almost exclusively by employees of Achieve, testing companies (ACT and the College Board), and pro-accountability groups (e.g., America's Choice, Student Achievement Partners, the Hoover Institute). Practitioners and subject matter experts complained that they were excluded from the development process....In addition to the financial support from the federal government, the Gates Foundation is a significant contributor to the common core standards effort. A number of confidential iterations of the standards took place between the developers and state departments of education. (p. 5)

The first public draft was released on March 10, 2010, and the "final recommendations" version was released June 2, 2010. States wanting access to the second round of Obama's Race to the Top monies were required to adopt the CCSS by August 2, 2010 (Mathis, 2010). The Gates Foundation's support for the Common Core State Standards is also well documented. A late 2012 search for the phrase "common core" on the Gates Foundation database produced 56 grants from 2008-2012 totaling just over \$96.4 million (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012).

It is important to highlight two aspects of the CCSS here: First, despite being called "state" standards, the CCSS are really national standards (Mathis, 2010; Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). They were originally developed with national standards as the goal, and calling them state standards was mainly a prudent tactic to help negotiate the treacherous politics of national standards and national curriculum. Second, the CCSS are largely a top-down reform effort, where teachers were only brought on later to establish buy-in (Cody, 2009).

The buy-in for the CCSS is significant too. Not only does the coalition of support for the CCSS include business leaders and neo-liberals like Gates, it also includes some cultural conservatives like E.D. Hirsch—who says that his Core Knowledge curriculum fits well with the CCSS (Hirsch, 2013), most of the Democratic Party, large numbers of Republicans, and both of the major teachers' unions (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2012). The support for CCSS is very much like NCLB with two very important missing pieces: The Civil Rights organizations and discourse around racial achievement gaps and inequality are notably absent.

#### 4 Critical Education

In fact, the CCSS has followed an eerily similar path to NCLB, which itself started as the standards movement of the 1990s vis-à-vis the governors and states, led to the adoption high-stakes tests at the state level, and then evolved as the foundation for NCLB's testing regime (Au, 2009d; Karp, 2003; Thompson, 2001). Also similar to NCLB was that the CCSS has been as much a political maneuver as anything else, one that is not based in research. As one of the few published critics of CCSS, Tienken (2012) points out, "The vendors of the CCSS have a problem: They have no independently affirmed data that demonstrate the validity of the standards as a vehicle to improve economic strength, build 21st century skills, or achieve the things they claim are lacking in the current public school system" (p. 155). Simply put, there is a severe lack of research evidence that increased standards correlate with increases in test scores and achievement generally (Guisbond et al., 2012; National Research Council, 2011; Weiss & Long, 2013), and a similar lack of evidence that increased test scores correlate with increased competitiveness in the global economy (Krueger, 1998; Orlich, 2004; Tienken, 2011)—two of the central presumptions undergirding the arguments for advancing the CCSS.

Another similarity between NCLB and the CCSS is in the opposition. Citing local control, fears of federal over-reach vis-à-vis a national curriculum, fiscal efficiency, and parents' rights, as with NCLB (Apple, 2006), the CCSS has caused a split amongst some conservatives. Right wing extremists, mostly populist libertarians, states' rights advocates, and Tea Party-styled free market nationalists like the Pioneer Institute, the American Principles Project, the Washington Policy Center, and the Goldwater Institute, have lined up against the CCSS because of fears of federal control and critiques of big government spending (see, e.g., Butcher, McGroarty, & Finne, 2012; McGroarty & Robbins, 2012). The American Legislative Exchange Council has been unable to reach a consensus due to internal disagreement around the CCSS and ultimately vetoed a resolution in support of the standards (Ujifusa, 2012), and the Republican National Committee passed a resolution in opposition to the CCSS, citing the over-standardization of the curriculum and the possibly illegal use of student data without the consent of parents ("RNC passes resolution to shut down common core curriculum," 2013). Up to 10 states have started backtracking, to varying degrees, on their support of the CCSS, and conservative Republicans in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Alabama have all made significant headway in blocking the implementation of the CCSS in their states (Strauss, 2013). The language of the conservative resistance is worth noting too: Drawing on populist fears about socialized medical care, some are referring to the CCSS as "ObamaCore" (Education Freedom Ohio, 2013). There is enough tension amongst conservatives that the Thomas B. Fordham Institute has taken to arguing why other conservatives should support the CCSS (Porter-Magee & Stern, 2013) and enough worry amongst policymakers that U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, issued a statement calling critics of the Common Core "conspiracy theorists" (Horton, 2013).

While liberal Democrats are fully on board with the CCSS, as was the case with NCLB, the CCSS have also caused almost equal consternation amongst left progressives. While NCLB relied upon a rhetoric of achieving racial equality to gain support from liberals and progressives (Au, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 2007), the powers that be have made things so terrible in public education through budget cuts, ossified state standards, and high-stakes tests based on those standards, that to many progressives the CCSS look like, and might actually be, an improvement over what many teachers have been dealing with in many places. The CCSS certainly are in many ways more constructivist than previous state standards, and in some important ways they focus on higher-order skills. (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). When faced with completely scripted curriculum (Au, 2011b), as is

the case in many low performing schools and districts (Jaeger, 2006), the CCSS must feel downright liberating. Further, because its lack of content prescription, anecdotal reports are that many progressive educators can find ways to do critical work within and through the CCSS (Rethinking Schools, in press). All of which raises some interesting questions: Just because the CCSS are better than the bad standards we had before, does that make them inherently good? Further, just what are “good” standards? Is it possible, within the context of current education reforms, to have “good” standards?

### **CCSS in the Context of Corporate Education Reform**

The tensions amongst left progressives point to what I think is the most important consideration with regards to the CCSS: political and policy context. I am increasingly convinced that context defines policy such that, however “good” a particular piece of policy may appear to be, and no matter how many well-meaning people were involved in its advocacy, all education policy ultimately is defined by how it is used within political context. Charter schools are a good example to illustrate this. Charters started as union supported community schools designed to incubate new and effective educational practices, but within the context of corporate education reform they became beachheads for the privatization of public education and the dismantling of teachers unions (Fabricant & Fine, 2012; Karp, 2013). There is simply no reform that can be viewed outside the context into which it is introduced. In this context the CCSS feel just like the 2.0 version of the last standards movement, and like the last standards movement will undoubtedly lead to NCLB 2.0 in terms of high-stakes, standardized testing.

While my previous point is pure prognostication, we already know a few important, concrete things about the CCSS within the context of corporate education reform initiatives. For instance, after mapping some of the basic relationships of the origins of CCSS and the relationships between those involved with its implementation, Pennington, Obenchain, Papola & Kmitta (2012) remark that:

The need to implement and assess the established CCSS situates those who created the standards as rainmakers for educational publishing companies and educational consulting non-profits they are affiliated with. The added altruistic connotations of the terms foundation and non-profit create an image of organizations aiding education similar to NGOs while they do not reveal the realities behind how the organizations are aligning themselves in ways to make substantial financial gains by making their services necessary for the CCSS. (n.p.)

There is certainly money to be made. Some conservative groups like the Pioneer Institute and American Principles Project suggest a mid-range estimation that the CCSS implementation will cost \$15.8 billion over seven years: \$1.2 billion for assessments, \$5.3 billion for professional development, \$6.9 billion for tech infrastructure and support (Accountability Works, 2012). The Fordham Institute predicts the CCSS could cost \$12.1 billion over the next 1-3 years (Murphy, Regenstein, & McNamara, 2012). Given this potential market for private industry, it is not surprising that *The New York Times* reports venture capital investment in public education has increased 80% since 2005 to a total of \$632 million as of 2012 (Rich, 2013). The development of the CCSS and the consequent rolling out of assessments, preparation materials, professional development, and other CCSS-related infrastructure fits quite well with the neoliberal project of reframing public education around the logics of private businesses (Apple, 2006) as well as the shifting of public monies into the coffers of for-profit corporations through private contracts

## 6 Critical Education

(Burch, 2009).

The existing policy context is also causing concern amongst some CCSS supporters for similar reasons. Echoing Thompson's (2001) lament from over a decade earlier, Brooks and Dietz (2012/2013) suggest that the CCSS are good standards, but express concerns that within the current policy structures, which rely on top-down prescriptions and are connected to heavily to contracts with various testing and curriculum companies, they inevitably lead to too much standardization. They worry that,

...the Common Core State Standards Initiative goes far beyond the content of the standards themselves. The initiative conflates standards with standardization. For instance, many states are mandating that school districts select standardized student outcome measures and teacher evaluation systems from a pre-established state list. To maximize the likelihood of student success on standardized measures, many districts are requiring teachers to use curriculum materials produced by the same companies that are producing the testing instruments, even predetermining the books students will read on the basis of the list of sample texts that illustrate the standard. The initiative compartmentalizes thinking, privileges profit-making companies, narrows the creativity and professionalism of teachers, and limits meaningful student learning. (p. 65)

Additionally we are seeing CCSS being used within the context of the current education reform efforts as a way to once again cover up and avoid other real-world issues like poverty, health care, etc. Adleman and Taylor (2013) point out that, besides an all too brief "application to students with disabilities," the CCSS remain absolutely silent on the myriad of factors such as "restricted opportunities associated with poverty and low income, difficult family circumstances, excessive mobility, lack of English language skills, violent neighborhoods, substance abuse, inadequate health care, and lack of enrichment opportunities" (n.p.), all factors that we know impact and shape student performance, and all factors that corporate education reformers mostly gloss in their policy initiatives (Berliner, 2012).

Given the history of standards reform efforts in the United States, the coalition driving the CCSS initiative, the support they have lined up for the standards, and the trajectory of the CCSS within the context of corporate education reform, all evidence points to the creation of a national high-stakes test based on the CCSS. When this happens, the data-heads will finally have a metric to easily compare all states, schools, districts, administrators, teachers, students, etc., regardless of any concerns about the accuracy, validity, or reliability of the assessment (Au, 2009d).

### **CCSS for Literacy in Social Studies/History**

NCLB and its focus on high-stakes, standardized testing of mathematics and literacy has meant two trends for the teaching of social studies. The first was that there was a broad reduction of the teaching of social studies. In what became a game of zero-sum curriculum, as schools increased the time spent on tested subjects, non-tested subjects like social studies were increasingly reduced. The other lesser trend has been that social studies has increasingly become a site of ancillary literacy instruction (Au, 2007, 2009c). This "lesser" positioning relative to the more widely tested subjects has meant that in recent years the social studies has never really "counted." The *Common Core State Standards for Literacy in Social Studies/History* (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) continues this trend.

The *CCSS for Literacy in Social Studies/History* (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) are short, and, they treat the social studies as a vehicle for literacy instruction rather than a means for actually teaching social studies and history (see, e.g., Gilles, Wang, Smith, & Johnson, 2013). They are not particularly “bad” as far as standards go. They focus on looking at relationships, evidence and claims, understanding, interpreting, and evaluating complex texts, and the development and interaction of ideas and people. They even ask students to do both expository research and narrative writing connected to social studies (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

A striking aspect of the Social Studies/History CCSS is that they essentially exchange the pure content of previous era’s ossified standards for a new focus on pure skills. While existing content-focused social studies/history standards have never been particularly good, in exchanging pure content in favor of pure skills, as my *Rethinking Schools* colleague, Bill Bigelow, remarked in conversation, the *CCSS for Literacy in Social Studies/History* literally take the “social” out of the “social studies.” In some important ways there simply is no “there” there. This is one of the reasons why Beane (2013) has argued that “...these standards are insufficient to define the values and skills that ought to be the center of the curriculum in our nation’s schools and learned by all students ... we must turn to the idea of democracy and the nearly forgotten tradition of the democratic core” (p. 13). For Beane, not only do students need the kinds of skills addressed in the CCSS, but they also need to learn values of freedom and social responsibility and take up pressing social issues.

### **The C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards**

Given the CCSS focus on literacy and mathematics, in what I see as an earnest attempt to save the Social Studies, in conjunction with the Council of Chief State School Officers some leaders in Social Studies education have developed *The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013). The current draft of the C3 parallels the CCSS in some important ways. For instance, in what clearly looks to me to be a strategic attempt to fend off fights about both the politics of content and the potential for federal overreach into states’ rights, the C3 focus more on skills rather than specific content, which according to the authors is, “best left to local decision makers” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013, p. 29).

The development of any set of standards provides an occasion to consider what is being marketed as official knowledge and what gets constructed as commonsense within those standards (Apple, 2000), and the development of the C3 standards is no exception. There are some aspects of the C3 standards that are compelling. I think the overall framing of the C3 standards is quite smart. Asking students to focus on what the C3 framers call “compelling questions” and going through an inquiry process that includes looking at claims, counter-claims, and evidence is undoubtedly part of strong social studies teaching and learning. Given education reformers’ current penchant for ignoring research, the C3 standards are refreshing in that they smack of what research tells us about good social studies education. There are also some good, potentially critical edges within the C3 standards. For instance, the C3 asks students to “understand the important institutions of their society and the principles that these institutions are intended to reflect,” evaluate the effectiveness of institutions in “addressing social and political problems,” and critique relationships among governments, civil societies and economic markets” (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2013, p. 30).

My initial review, however, did raise some critical concerns about the C3 standards as well. For instance they focus on liberal individualism to the exclusion of non-Western conceptions of community, social, and cultural collectives. They also assume the goodness of market capitalism while seemingly avoiding issues around the exploitation of humans and the environment. Additionally, the C3 standards only continue my concern that civic education is framed in ways that either domesticate or marginalize activism as a legitimate and valuable means of pushing for social and political change. Unfortunately, I have similar questions about the discourse of citizenship within and through the C3 standards, especially given the rise of white nationalism and xenophobia in the United States. The C3 standards also seem to operate on the presumption that the United States really does operate on “democratic values,” when that presumption often depends on which community or economic class one hails from.

### **Real Talk About Social Studies Content**

The above critiques about the C3 standards point to a major issue within the social studies: We lack real talk about the fight over social studies/history content in public schools, a fight we are already in the midst of whether we admit to it or not. The politics of knowledge and the implications for curriculum are at the center of the CCSS and the C3, and the lack of discussion of content, while certainly a viable political strategy, weakens them greatly. As an extreme example, we only need to look at the state-funded religious charter schools in New Orleans whose official curriculum includes teaching that humans and dinosaurs roamed the earth together, that the Trail of Tears was God’s way of leading Cherokees to Christ, that most slave owners in the United States treated their slaves well, that Africa just needs more Christianity to save it, and that the Klu Klux Klan was simply a righteous organization that mostly went after the morally corrupt (Pan, 2012). We may all scoff at these ridiculous assertions, but the Bible certainly qualifies as a complex text, and this particular cut of conservative evangelical Christians has been consistently good at finding biblical evidence to support their positions.

The same can be said of the struggle over the Texas history standards, where a bloc of conservative evangelical Christians on the state Board of Education there removed the Seneca Falls Convention and women’s suffrage activist, Carrie Chapman Catt, from the standards, took Harriet Tubman off of the list of good citizens, downplayed the slavery of African Americans, swapped out Martin Luther King Jr. Day for another holiday, and minimized the incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII, amongst other examples (Foner, 2010; McKinley Jr., 2010; Shorto, 2010). As Foner (2010) sums up:

More interesting is what the...standards tell us about conservatives’ overall vision of American history and society and how they hope to instill that vision in the young....Judging from the updated social studies curriculum, conservatives want students to come away from a Texas education with a favorable impression of: women who adhere to traditional gender roles, the Confederacy, some parts of the Constitution, capitalism, the military and religion. They do not think students should learn about women who demanded greater equality; other parts of the Constitution; slavery, Reconstruction and the unequal treatment of nonwhites generally; environmentalists; labor unions; federal economic regulation; or foreigners. (p. 5)

Foner’s point highlights a key point: The content of any set of standards, be they the CCSS, C3, or any other, are critically important for all students, especially given the current struggles over education reform and what it takes to meet needs of low income, immigrant, and kids of color in



this country.

We've already seen the decline of multicultural education as a direct result of NCLB-era high-stakes testing, as well as a disparate curricular impact on low income Black, Brown, and Native kids (Au, 2009a; Patrick, 2008). Further, high-stakes testing aside, conservatives are most definitely on the move when it comes to what they think needs to be taught in the social studies. In addition to the above-mentioned examples from Texas and New Orleans, we can look to Wineburg's (2012-2013) recent reactionary attack on Howard Zinn's (1995) *A People's History of the United States* in *American Educator*, the magazine for the American Federation of Teachers, a firm supporter of the CCSS. Or we can look at the racist attacks on the Mexican American Studies program in Tucson, Arizona (Au, 2011a; Bigelow, 2012; Sleeter, 2012), a program based on culturally centered and historically contingent curriculum and pedagogy (Romero, Arce, & Cammarota, 2009) and which has been empirically shown to increase the achievement of its students using typical indicators (Cabrera, Milem, & Marx, 2012; Cappellucci et al., 2011). Whether we as a field admit it or not, we are in the midst of a fight about the politics of social studies content, and communities of color are feeling the brunt of this struggle in particularly sharp ways.

## Conclusion

We are currently in the honeymoon period with the CCSS. The standards are mostly here, but the tests are mostly not, and for now many are impressed with how much curricular freedom the CCSS seems to give them – the same kind of freedom that exists within the C3 standards as well. Just wait though. The tests will come, on computers, even with essays being scored by automated programs (Farley, 2012). I say this with such certainty because, not only has the historic role of standards development only led to testing, but, more importantly, high-stakes, standardized testing is all that education reformers have to offer. When it comes to assessment, their vision is so limited by their ideology that they cannot see anything else.

Within this context, then, it feels like we in the social studies are left with a strategic choice. We could join a rapidly growing, parent, teacher, and administrator-led resistance movement and fight the tests. There are certainly lots of good, sound, moral, ethical, political, and research-based reasons for making this choice, but it is not the choice that will immediately get you institutional buy-in. It is possible that we may not be mad enough about the issue of test-driven curriculum since social studies teachers have in some ways gotten off easy compared to our colleagues in math and literacy – at least we haven't been given scripted social studies curriculum...yet.

The other option is, of course, to work towards a coherent set of social studies standards like the C3. Then, if states adopt them, when the inevitable tests arrive, we can at least be included in a high-stakes, standardized social studies test. Then at least we can "count." This tactic is problematic: It presupposes the hegemony of high-stakes, standardized tests, succumbs to the cynicism that such testing can't be stopped, and perhaps worst of all, it tacitly endorses such testing as valid, reliable, and accurate measures of learning and teaching. To be clear, I don't in any way want to suggest that the framers of the C3 are actively working towards this end, but I also don't think we as a field should be naïve about what it means to establish social studies standards in the context of corporate education reform. Do we really want to justify evaluating teachers based on value added measurement in the social studies?

In some ways it doesn't matter what the specifics of the CCSS social studies literacy

standards are, or what my colleagues in social studies education are strategizing to through the development of the C3. The United States has never been very good at dealing with social studies standards (see, e.g., Cornbleth & Waugh, 1995), let alone assessment of those or any other standards. If the C3 standards gain the traction that the framers are aiming for, the real questions to grapple with will be: When the tests come, and they are coming, what will they do to the social studies? Is our best strategy to become one of the tested subjects, and if so, will we be killing the social studies in the process?<sup>1</sup>

## References

- Accountability Works. (2012). National cost of aligning states and localities to the Common Core Standards. Boston: Pioneer Institute.  
[http://www.accountabilityworks.org/photos/Cmmn\\_Cr\\_Cst\\_Stdy.Fin.2.22.12.pdf](http://www.accountabilityworks.org/photos/Cmmn_Cr_Cst_Stdy.Fin.2.22.12.pdf)
- Pacific Research Institute, Boston. Retrieved from <http://www.pioneerinstitute.org>.
- Adelman, H., & Taylor, L. (2013). A broader bolder approach to the Common Core engages the whole child and all children. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/elaine-weiss/common-core\\_b\\_2427484.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/elaine-weiss/common-core_b_2427484.html)
- Apple, M. W. (2000). *Official knowledge: Democratic education in a conservative age* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Apple, M. W. (2006). *Educating the "right" way: Markets, standards, god, and inequality* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Au, W. (2004). Brown v. Bush. *Rethinking Schools*, 18(3), 21-22.
- Au, W. (2007). High-stakes testing and curricular control: A qualitative metasynthesis. *Educational Researcher*, 36(5), 258-267.
- Au, W. (2009a). High-stakes testing and Discursive control: The triple bind for non-standard student identities. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 11(2), 65-71.
- Au, W. (2009b). Obama, where art thou?: Hoping for change in U.S. education policy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(2), 309-320.
- Au, W. (2009c). Social studies, social justice: W(h)ither the social studies in high-stakes testing? *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 35(1), 43-58.

---

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Sarah Shear and Mark Helmsing for their comments on this article.

Two different versions of this paper were delivered under the following titles:

"Will the Social Studies be Killed in the Saving?: Considering the CCSS, C3, and the Fate of the Social Studies within Corporate Education Reform." Social Studies Research SIG Business Meeting, 2013 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA, April 28, 2013.

"The Standards Movement Rides Again! The Social Studies, Common Core, Social Justice, and the Politics of Knowledge." Division C Affirmative Action invited Session, 2013 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association. San Francisco, CA, April 29, 2013.

- Au, W. (2009d). *Unequal by design: High-stakes testing and the standardization of inequality*. New York: Routledge.
- Au, W. (2011a). *Critical curriculum studies: Education, consciousness, and the politics of knowing*. New York: Routledge.
- Au, W. (2011b). Teaching under the new Taylorism: High-stakes testing and scientific management in the 21st century curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 43(1), 25-45. doi: 10.1080/00220272.2010.521261
- Beane, J. A. (2013). A common core of a different sort: Putting democracy at the center of the curriculum. *Middle School Journal*, 44(3), 6-14.
- Berliner, D. C. (2012). Effects of inequality and poverty vs. teachers and schooling on America's youth. *Teachers College Record*, 116(1). Retrieved from <http://www.tcrecord.org> (2014 paper publication).
- Bigelow, B. (2012). *Rethinking Columbus* banned in Tucson. Retrieved from <http://rethinkingschoolsblog.wordpress.com/2012/01/13/rethinking-columbus-banned-in-tucson/>
- Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. (2012). Grants search Retrieved December 15, 2012, 2012, from <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/grants/Pages/search.aspx>
- Brooks, J. G., & Dietz, M. E. (2012/2013). The dangers & opportunities of the Common Core: Can public education emerge from the Common Core initiative with a renewed focus on student learning? *Educational Leadership*, 70(4), 64-67.
- Burch, P. (2009). *Hidden markets: The new education privatization*. New York: Routledge.
- Butcher, J., McGroarty, E., & Finne, L. (2012). Why the Common Core is bad for America. Washington Policy Center American Principles Project
- Goldwater Institute, Seattle, WA. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpolicy.org>.
- Cabrera, N. L., Milem, J. F., & Marx, R. W. (2012). An empirical analysis of the effects of Mexican American Studies participation on student achievement within Tucson Unified School District. Report to Special Master Dr. Willis D. Hawley on the Tucson Unified School District Desegregation Case., Tucson, AZ. Retrieved from [http://works.bepress.com/nolan\\_1\\_cabrera/17/](http://works.bepress.com/nolan_1_cabrera/17/)
- Cappellucci, D. F., Williams, C., Hernandez, J. J., Nelson, L. P., Casteel, T., Gilzean, G., & Faulkner, G. (2011). Curriculum audit of the Mexican American studies department Tucson Unified School District Tucson, Arizona. Cambium Learning, Inc.; National Academic Educational Partners, Miami Lakes, FL. Retrieved from [http://www.tucsonweekly.com/images/blogimages/2011/06/16/1308282079-az\\_masd\\_audit\\_final\\_1\\_.pdf](http://www.tucsonweekly.com/images/blogimages/2011/06/16/1308282079-az_masd_audit_final_1_.pdf)
- Cody, A. (2009). The secret sixty prepare to write standards for 50 million. Retrieved from [http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/2009/07/national\\_standards\\_process\\_ign.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/2009/07/national_standards_process_ign.html)
- Cornbleth, C., & Waugh, D. (1995). *The great speckled bird* (1st ed.). New York: St. Martin's Press.

## 12 Critical Education

- Council of Chief State School Officers. (2013). The college, career, and civic life (C3) framework for social studies state standards: State guidance for enhancing the rigor of K-12 civics, economic, geography, and history (4-9-13 draft for commentary). Council of Chief State School Officers, Washington, D.C. Retrieved from
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2007). Race, inequality and educational accountability: The irony of 'No Child Left Behind'. *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, 10(3), 245-260.
- Education Freedom Ohio. (2013). Giving Common Core pause... Retrieved from <http://educationfreedomohio.org/2013/04/17/ohio-calls-are-working-to-give-obamacore-pause/>
- Fabricant, M., & Fine, M. (2012). *Charter schools and the corporate makeover of public education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Farley, T. (2012). Lies, damn lies, and statistics, or what's really up with automated essay scoring. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/todd-farley/lies-damn-lies-and-statis\\_b\\_1574711.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/todd-farley/lies-damn-lies-and-statis_b_1574711.html)
- Foner, E. (2010, April 5). Twisting history in Texas. *The Nation*, 290, 4-6.
- Gilles, C., Wang, Y., Smith, J., & Johnson, D. (2013). "I'm no longer just teaching history.": Professional development for teaching Common Core State Standards for literacy in social studies. *Middle School Journal*, 44(3), 34-43.
- Guisbond, L., Neill, M., & Schaeffer, B. (2012). NCLB's lost decade for educational progress: What can we learn from this policy failure? FairTest: National Center for Fair & Open Testing, Retrieved from <http://fairtest.org/NCLB-lost-decade-report-home>.
- Hirsch, E. D. (2013). Are schools dumbing down the Common Core Standards? Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/e-d-hirsch-jr/are-schools-dumbing-down\\_b\\_2916297.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/e-d-hirsch-jr/are-schools-dumbing-down_b_2916297.html)
- Horton, P. (2013). Paul Horton: Of Common Core, conspiracies, and coups d'etat. Retrieved from [http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/2013/04/paul\\_horton\\_of\\_common\\_core\\_con.html?cmp=SOC-SHR-FB](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/2013/04/paul_horton_of_common_core_con.html?cmp=SOC-SHR-FB)
- Jaeger, E. (2006). Silencing teachers in an era of scripted reading. *Rethinking Schools*, 20(3), 39-41.
- Karp, S. (2003). Let them eat tests: NCLB and federal education policy. In L. Christensen & S. Karp (Eds.), *Rethinking school reform* (pp. 199-213). Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools.
- Karp, S. (2007/2008, Winter). No child left untested: NCLB stalled, but still armed and dangerous Retrieved February, 2009, from [http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/22\\_02/nclb222.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/22_02/nclb222.shtml)
- Karp, S. (2010). School reform we can't believe in. *Rethinking Schools*, 24(3). Retrieved from [http://www.rethinkingschools.org/restrict.asp?path=archive/24\\_03/24\\_03\\_NCLBstan.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/restrict.asp?path=archive/24_03/24_03_NCLBstan.shtml)
- Karp, S. (2013). Charter schools and the future of public education: It's time to refocus public policy on providing excellent public schools for all. New Jersey Education Association, Trenton, NJ. Retrieved from <http://www.njea.org/news-and-publications/njea-review/march-2013/charter-schools-and-the-future-of-public-education>

- Krueger, A. B. (1998). Reassessing the view that American schools are broken. *Federal Reserve Board of New York Economic Policy Review*, 4(1), 29-43.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools. *Educational Researcher*, 35(7), 3-12.
- Mathis, W. J. (2010). The 'common core' standards initiative: An effective reform tool? The Great Lakes Center for Education Research & Practice, East Lansing, MI. Retrieved from <http://www.greatlakescenter.org>
- McGroarty, E., & Robbins, J. (2012). Controlling education from the top: Why Common Core is bad for America. Pioneer Institute. Retrieved from <http://pioneerinstitute.org/download/controlling-education-from-the-top/>
- McKinley Jr., J. C. (2010, March 12). Texas conservatives win curriculum change, *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/13/education/13texas.html>
- Murphy, P., Regenstein, E., & McNamara, K. (2012). Putting a price tag on the Common Core: How much will smart implementation cost? Thomas B. Fordham Institute, Washington, D.C. Retrieved from <http://www.edexcellence.net/publications/putting-a-price-tag-on-the-common-core.html>
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common Core State Standards grades 6-12 literacy in history/social studies, science, & technical subjects*. Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers.
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2012). Statements of support Retrieved April 15, 2013, from <http://www.corestandards.org/resources/statements-of-support>
- National Research Council. (2011). Incentives and test-based accountability in education. Committee on Incentives and Test-Based Accountability in Public Education, M. Hout & S.W. Elliott (Eds.). Board on Testing and Assessment, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, Washington, D.C. Retrieved from.
- Orlich, D. C. (2004). No child left behind: An illogical accountability model. *Clearing House*, 78(1), 6-11.
- Pan, D. (2012). 14 wacky "facts" kids will learn in Louisiana's voucher schools. *MotherJones*. Retrieved from <http://www.motherjones.com/blue-marble/2012/07/photos-evangelical-curricula-louisiana-tax-dollars>
- Patrick, R. (2008). Perspectives on change: A continued struggle for academic success and cultural relevancy at an American Indian school in the midst of No Child Left Behind. *Journal of American Indian Education*, 47(1), 65-81.
- Pennington, J. L., Obenchain, K. M., Papola, A., & Kmitta, L. (2012). The Common Core: Educational redeemer or rainmaker. *Teachers College Record*. Retrieved from <http://www.tcrecord.org>
- Porter, A. C., McMaken, J., Hwang, J., & Yang, R. (2011). Common Core Standards: The new U.S. intended curriculum. *Educational Researcher*, 40(3), 103-116. doi: 10.3102/0013189X11405038

- Porter-Magee, K., & Stern, S. (2013). Why conservatives should support the Common Core. Retrieved from <http://www.edexcellence.net/commentary/education-gadfly-daily/common-core-watch/2013/why-conservatives-should-support-the-common-core.html>
- Rethinking Schools. (in press). Editorial: Common Core. *Rethinking Schools*.
- Rich, M. (2013). NewSchools fund attracts more capital. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/01/education/newschools-venture-fund-links-with-rethink-education.html?ref=education&\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/01/education/newschools-venture-fund-links-with-rethink-education.html?ref=education&_r=1&)
- RNC passes resolution to shut down common core curriculum. (2013). *Illinois Review: Crossroads of the Conservative Community*. Retrieved from <http://illinoisreview.typepad.com/illinoisreview/2013/04/rnc-passes-resolution-to-shut-down-common-core-curriculum.html>
- Romero, A., Arce, S., & Cammarota, J. (2009). A Barrio pedagogy: Identity, intellectualism, activism, and academic achievement through the evolution of critically compassionate intellectualism. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 12(2), 217-233.
- Shorto, R. (2010, February 14). Founding father?, *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/14/magazine/14texbooks-t.html>
- Sleeter, C. (2012). Ethnic studies and the struggle in Tucson. *Education Week*, 31(21). Retrieved from <http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/02/15/21sleeter.h31.html?tkn=VRMFRGuUcYPvsaR7iQ0tSO0BuBkBdu8hRyIN&cmp=clp-edweek>
- Strauss, V. (2013). Common Core Standards attacked by Republicans. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/04/19/common-core-standards-attacked-by-republicans/>
- Thompson, S. (2001). The authentic standards movement and its evil twin. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 82(5), 358-362.
- Tienken, C. H. (2011). Common Core State Standards: An example of data-less decision making. *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*, 7(4), 3-18.
- Tienken, C. H. (2012). The Common Core State Standards: The emperor is still looking for his clothes. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 48(4), 152-155. doi: 10.1080/00228958.2012.733928
- Ujifusa, A. (2012). ALEC votes down anti-common-core resolution. Retrieved from [http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state\\_edwatch/2012/11/alec\\_votes\\_down\\_anti-common\\_core\\_resolution.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/state_edwatch/2012/11/alec_votes_down_anti-common_core_resolution.html)
- Weiss, E., & Long, D. (2013). Market-oriented education reforms' rhetoric trumps reality: The impacts of test-based teacher evaluations, school closures, and increased charter-school access on student outcomes in Chicago, New York City, and Washington, D.C. Broader, Bolder Approach to Education, Retrieved from <http://boldapproach.org/rhetoric-trumps-reality>
- Wineburg, S. (2012-2013). Undue certainty: Where Howard Zinn's *A people's history* falls short. *American Educator*, 36(4), 27-34.
- Zinn, H. (1995). *A people's history of the United States: 1492-present* (Rev. and updated ed.). New York: HarperPerennial.

### **Author**

WAYNE AU is an assistant professor at University of Washington, Bothell. His research interests broadly encompass critical education theory and teaching for social justice. More specifically his research focuses on educational equity, high-stakes testing, curriculum theory, educational policy studies and social studies education.

# Critical Education

[criticaleducation.org](http://criticaleducation.org)

ISSN 1920-4175

## Editors

Sandra Mathison, *University of British Columbia*  
Stephen Petrina, *University of British Columbia*  
E. Wayne Ross, *University of British Columbia*

## Associate Editors

Abraham P. DeLeon, *University of Texas at San Antonio*  
Adam Renner, 1970-2010

## Editorial Collective

Faith Ann Agostinone, *Aurora University*  
Wayne Au, *University of Washington, Bothell*  
Marc Bousquet, *Santa Clara University*  
Joe Cronin, *Antioch University*  
Antonia Darder, *University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign*  
George Dei, *OISE/University of Toronto*  
Stephen C. Fleury, *Le Moyne College*  
Kent den Heyer, *University of Alberta*  
Nirmala Erevelles, *University of Alabama*  
Michelle Fine, *City University of New York*  
Gustavo Fischman, *Arizona State University*  
Erica Frankenberg, *Penn State University*  
Melissa Freeman, *University of Georgia*  
David Gabbard, *East Carolina University*  
Rich Gibson, *San Diego State University*  
Dave Hill, *Anglia Ruskin University, UK*  
Nathalia E. Jaramillo, *University of Auckland*  
Saville Kushner, *University of Auckland*  
Zeus Leonardo, *University of California, Berkeley*  
Pauline Lipman, *University of Illinois, Chicago*  
Lisa Loutzenheiser, *University of British Columbia*  
Marvin Lynn, *University of Illinois, Chicago*  
Linda Mabry, *Washington State University, Vancouver*  
Sheila Macrine, *Montclair State University*  
Perry M. Marker, *Sonoma State University*  
Rebecca Martusewicz, *Eastern Michigan University*  
Peter McLaren, *University of California, Los Angeles*  
Stuart R. Poyntz, *Simon Fraser University*  
Kenneth J. Saltman, *DePaul University*  
Patrick Shannon, *Penn State University*  
Kevin D. Vinson, *University of the West Indies, Barbados*  
John F. Welsh, Santa Fe, NM