
The Adoption of the Common Core Standards in Modern Education

Researched Position: Common Core

One of the greatest controversies in modern education is centered on the adoption of the Common Core Standards. Common Core is meant to provide specific benchmarks in order to make education more universal and better prepare students for real world expectations. While this may sound good in theory, the execution of such a significant fete has proven to be less unifying. Parents and educators alike are struggling to accept Common Core and implement it into the classroom. As with anything, there are certainly positives and negatives about Common Core. As it relates to English Language Arts, I believe that the concept of Common Core has the potential to be highly beneficial for the educational system, and the current framework is on the right track for achieving its purpose.

The Common Core standards have been plagued by controversy since their introduction in 2009. With knowledgeable individuals on both sides of the argument, it is difficult to determine which stance to take. However, by analyzing both sides, it is clear that there is validity to either position. Only by truly understanding what Common Core is can one make an informed, educated decision about whether or not the nation should be moving towards common standards.

Individuals that support Common Core have many reasons why they believe it is a viable option. According to The Council of Chief State School Officers and The National Governor's Association, the creators of the Common Core Standards, there are many myths about what implementation of the standards entails. One common myth is that the standards dictate what teachers should teach. However, in an article entitled "Myths vs. Facts," the creators refute this claim by saying,

Teachers know best about what works in the classroom. That is why these standards establish what students need to learn but do not dictate how teachers should teach. Instead, schools and teachers will decide how best to help students reach the standards. Decisions on how to implement the standards are made at the state and local levels. As such, states and localities are taking different approaches to implementing the standards and providing their teachers with the supports they need to help students successfully reach the standards.

Many of the problems associated with Common Core stem from confusion and ignorance.

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When looking directly at the standards, it is clear teachers still have the freedom to decide how to teach the material. The standards are merely a guideline for what students should be expected to accomplish while in the school system. In fact, this is specifically stated on page 6 of the standards where it reads,

The Standards define what all students are expected to know and be able to do, not how teachers should teach. For instance, the use of play with young children is not specified by the Standards, but it is welcome as a valuable activity in its own right and as a way to help students meet the expectations in this document. Furthermore, while the Standards make references to some particular forms of content, including mythology, foundational U.S. documents, and Shakespeare, they do not—indeed, cannot—enumerate all or even most of the content that students should learn. The Standards must therefore be complemented by a well-developed, content-rich curriculum consistent with the expectations laid out in this document. (Common Core State Standards for English and Language Arts)

Of course, the writers of the standards are clearly prone to bias when addressing issues associated with Common Core. However, perhaps the most logical consultants would be the educators who know the students and have a vested interest in the future of education. According to neaToday journalist Cindy Long in her article “Six Ways the Common Core is good for Students,” there are many attributes that teachers like about Common Core. One teacher says that Common Core “streamlines content,” making it easier to bring creativity back into the classroom (Long). Long’s article goes on to talk about how Common Core prepares students for college by having a set of standards that all students are to accomplish by graduation. This helps ensure that colleges across the country can have similar expectations for what students will know coming into post-secondary education.

Even with all of these positives, many people still oppose the universal adoption of Common Core. One common complaint is that Common Core would increase Standardized testing, and worse, increase the occurrence of teachers “teaching to the test” rather than teaching for enrichment. I have not found substantial evidence to support this claim, but I can concede that, if it’s true, that is certainly a major downfall of the current framework. However, now that No Child Left Behind is officially out and states are now designing their own accountability systems, I am hopeful that this will help eliminate many of the standardized tests. In addition, if all states adopted Common Core standards and used that test to determine student achievement, it seems there would actually be less testing. However, states would have to actually implement this, leaving decisions about testing in their hands. Another claim that directly affects Language Arts is that Common Core English harms literature. According to James Bascom in his article “9 Reasons Common Core is bad for Education,”

Progressive education has always been hostile to the teaching of the classic works of Western

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Literature. The Common Core English standards take this hostility a step further by replacing up to 70% of traditional literature with so-called “Informational Texts.” According to Common Core, an “Informational Text” is a non-fiction, non-literary type of document that includes newspaper articles, technical manuals, government documents, genres that most students find boring or that do not contain any wholesome moral or life lesson.

I can certainly understand this concern. After all, I think classic literature is immensely important in the classroom. However, I also can see the value in reading informational texts. So many people complain that they did not learn any “life skills” in school, and yet they are upset that schools are now trying to implement some of those skills. My senior year of high school, we read insurance policies as our “informational texts”. I was amazed at how much I learned, and how much I did not even understand in those readings. If I struggled to understand everything written in those brochures, I am quite sure that many adults also struggle with them. Therefore, I considered that to be a highly valuable lesson even though it had nothing to do with classic literature. Still, the primary focus in English classes is literature. The creators of Common Core state in their article “Myths vs. Facts”

The Common Core requires certain critical content for all students, including classic myths and stories from around the world, America’s founding documents, foundational American literature, and Shakespeare. Appropriately, the remaining crucial decisions about what content should be taught are made at the state and local levels. The standards require that a portion of what is read in high school should be informational text, yet the bulk of this portion will be accounted for in non-ELA disciplines that do not frequently use fictional texts. This means that stories, drama, poetry, and other literature account for the majority of reading that students will do in their ELA classes.

Another claim about Common Core’s effect on Language Arts is that the required readings are “dirty”. According to Joy Pullman’s article “Top Ten things Parents hate about Common Core,”

A red-haired mother of four kids read to our Indiana legislature selections from a Common Core-recommended book called “The Bluest Eyes,” by Toni Morrison. I’m a grown, married woman who enjoys sex just fine, thank you, but I sincerely wish I hadn’t heard her read those passages. I guess some people don’t find sympathetically portrayed rape scenes offensive, but I do. So I won’t quote them at you. If you have a perv-wish, Google will fill you in. Other objectionable books on the Common Core-recommended list include “Make Lemonade” by Virginia Euwer Wolff, “Black Swan Green” by David Mitchell, and “Dreaming in Cuban” by Cristina Garcia. There are so many excellent, classic works of literature available for children and young adults that schools can’t possibly fit all the good ones into their curriculum. So why did Common Core’s creators feel the need to recommend trash? Either they want kids to read

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trash or they don't think these are trash, and both are disturbing.

This accusation seems to be directed more at the teacher or the school district than at the standards themselves. While Common Core does have recommendations for each grade level, they are just that: recommendations. It is still up to the state Departments of Education, the school districts, or the teachers themselves what books will be taught in school.

With so many points of controversy, it seems unlikely that states will soon reach a consensus. However, when studying the facts, it seems clear to me that the Common Core is a step in the right direction for the future of education. There are many bumps to address before the standards are ready for full implementation, but once they are tested and revised, I think they will drastically improve education.

Rarely can two opposing sides come to agree on a single position. Rather, it is more likely that the sides reach a compromise that appeases both sides. In this case, I think that is the only viable option for reaching an agreement about Common Core. It seems to me that those that oppose Common Core are not necessarily against the idea altogether, rather they are against the current form of the standards. Therefore, I think the idea of developing common standards should be preserved, but the standards themselves should be adapted with more input from educators nationwide. Additionally, I think that teachers should be better educated on how Common Core affects them and how to implement them in their classrooms while still maintaining their right to teach how they see fit. Many teachers seem to be taking the standards too literally, worrying about revising their entire curriculum to fit the standards when, in fact, most of their curriculum already addresses many of the standards. Additionally, I think that the testing format should be reevaluated to ensure that students are not constantly worrying about standardized tests. Instead, there should be a single comprehensive test at the end of each school year and results should not determine teachers' salaries or employment. This way, they are less focused on teaching to the test and more focused on providing a rich education for their students. Obviously, this solution will not appease everyone, but hopefully it will help to bridge the gap and help Common Core to move forward in a less controversial way.

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