Common Goals, Common Core: Museums and Schools Work Together

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Common Core State Standards were released in June 2010, and have been rolled out in American schools since 2011. Common Core establishes standards at each grade level in math and English language arts with the goal of equipping students with twenty-first century skills that prepare them for college and careers. As of summer 2015, 43 states and the District of Columbia have implemented the Common Core State Standards. The only states that have not adopted the Standards are Alaska, Texas, Nebraska, and Virginia. Minnesota has adopted only the English Standards. South Carolina and Oklahoma repealed the Common Core in 2014.[1]

Museums all over the country have developed and offered education programs to help students and teachers align with the Standards to achieve academic excellence. Their focus on primary resources provide critical building blocks and their unique learning environments, instructional resources, and pedagogical strategies support the Standards in English language arts and mathematics.

As schools and museums get ready for the fifth year of Common Core, it is time for museum educators to take stock. What lessons have we learned and what have we achieved to help classroom educators to align their teaching with the Common Core? How have the Common Core Standards influenced museum education pedagogy? Do they move the museum-school relationships and reciprocity to any new levels? Or do they set us back? This guest-edited section of *JME* explores these questions and more.

Common Core: Skill-Based Learning

Compared to previous learning standards, the new Common Core State Standards focus more heavily on developing students' critical-thinking,

problem-solving, and analytical skills than on content acquisition. Unlike the old standards, which were content-based and often specified required texts, teachers now have greater flexibility in text selection. The Common Core Standards are designed to be relevant to the real world, reflecting the knowledge and skills that young people need for success in post-K-12 life to college and careers, so they are best positioned to compete successfully in the global economy.[2]

The development of the Common Core was a state-led effort coordinated by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. The final versions for English/language arts and mathematics standards were released in June 2010 as new academic benchmarks. To measure students' mastery of the new standards, two consortia, Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), led the development of new assessments aligned with the Common Core, first through field tests in 2014, followed by the first full assessment implementation in the 2014–15 school year.[3]

Common Core Standards encourage student-centered and inquiry-based learning. They emphasize the use of primary and secondary sources, exploration, and articulation of different perspectives, as well as the application of "close reading" of texts. For history and art museums in particular, objects, artifacts, and works of art provide students with opportunities for "close reading." In the museum, students can learn to look and look again, analyzing the choices artists made, or searching for physical evidence to support a claim. Students build their literacy skills in English language arts and in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects by posing questions, such as, "What is the subject being portrayed? What materials or tools were used, and how? What was the environment or cultural atmosphere in which the object or work of art was made?" Using the object or work of art as the focus of inquiry, students actively engage in critical thinking, communication, and problem solving.[4]

For example, two programs at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, Junior Archaeologists (for middle school students) and Artifact Analysis (for high school students), demonstrate how museum education programs enable students to practice these skills. The programs teach students about archaeology through a simulated dig site (Figure 1). Using artifact replicas, students learn about various aspects of civilizations in ancient Middle East, such as the development of agriculture, specialization of labor, emergence of cities, writing, belief systems, and modern archaeological practices, by

making observations, asking questions, discussions, collaboration, and analyzing evidence with the object/artifact replicas in the programs. Students engage in close reading of the objects in very much the same way as when reading a text, and must identify and describe the main idea and provide supporting evidence or details. This interdisciplinary approach opens the door for students to make connections among the artifacts and to build understanding of the contexts of objects that they "discover."

These museum programs addresses a range of the Common Core English Languages Arts Standards,[5] including:

- Speaking & Listening:
  CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6-8.1: Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
  CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.6-8.4: Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to

Figure 1   The simulated dig site — Kipper Family Archaeology Discovery Center — at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. Photo credit: The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2014.

accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

- Reading: Informational Texts:

  CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.6-8.1: Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

- History/Social Studies:

  CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

  CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

  CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.3: Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies.

Common Core Standards provide museum educators with new opportunities to build or strengthen programs for teachers and student audiences that sharpen literacies and practice thinking skills.

On the Common Core and the Next Generation Science Standards

In addition to the Common Core, a small but growing number of states have adopted the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). The Next Generation Science Standards were completed in April 2013. NGSS are based on the Framework for K-12 Science Education developed by the National Research Council. They emphasize rich content and practice to provide students an internationally benchmarked science education. This new set of standards also impacts teachers and museums in their curriculum design and program development respectively, while striving to maintain balanced alignment with the Common Core.

Opposition to Common Core

The implementation of Common Core has sparked controversies among teachers, principals, school boards, and parents. The Common Core does not set a rigid curriculum for students and it is intended to yield freedom for teachers to decide how best to reach their students. Criticism about the core includes the top-down approach of its rollout, the lack of sincerity and creditability as little

field-testing was done before its nationwide release, the lack of training or resources for teachers before the standard release, the vagueness in standard content and language, the inappropriateness to the early childhood development, the disruption of student learning and preparation for test preparation, and the lack of realistic consideration of how the Standards work with real classrooms and real students. Additional criticisms take aim at the social and political implications, arguing that the Standards continue to treat students as machinery for the workforce, that corporate education reformers are overtaking public education, and that many assessment "experts" have ties to testing companies.[6]

Despite scrutiny about the Common Core, many teachers remain buoyant about their role in inspiring students for the future and ability to shepherd them to achieve higher performance through the Standards. Pam Reilly, a second-grade teacher at Woodbury Elementary School and the 2014 Illinois Teacher of the Year, said, "The Common Core tells me what my students should master before they leave my classroom — it is the destination ... The journey of teaching to reach that destination is up to me."[7]

Cross Pollination and New Opportunities

What lessons have we learned, and what have we achieved to help teachers to align their teaching practices with the Common Core? How can we avoid falling into "'same old, same old' teaching with only superficial connections to the grade level Standards?"[8]

We have seen some evidence of stronger and deeper partnerships among museums, schools, and other cultural institutions to promote higher achievements of students' long-term educational outcomes. Common Core and other learning standards have also changed the ways museums develop their programs. Three articles in addition to the one described above explore Common Core's impact on museums, teachers, and students.

The Common Core State Standards offer a common language, shared goals diversity of teaching methods for educators across the country. Creativity, Collaboration, Critical thinking, and Communications (four "C"s) are integral in the Common Core and the students' skill development for the twenty-firstcentury. Juline Chevalier, formerly the Curator of Education at the Nasher Museum of Art, at Duke University, examines the museum's instructional strategies that lead to the proficiencies outlined in the Common Core standards in, "Words & Pictures: Literacy, Art and Common Core Together."

A major aspect of Common Core State Standards is its emphasis on teaching literacy through complex texts and evidence-based reading. Literacy is also sub-categorized into history/social studies, science, and technical subjects. How do history museums use their exhibitions and collections to work with teachers on building students' literacy? In "Finding Common Ground with the Common Core," Heidi Moisan, School Programs Manager at the Chicago History Museum, discusses the museum's exhibit-based student workshops that engage students in analyzing texts and objects while learning about the Great Chicago Fire in the nineteenth century.

Perhaps more than ever before, museums can play a more visible and bigger role in supporting teachers in the shift of standards. In 2013, Education Week Research Center conducted a national survey of approximately 500 K-12 teachers and instructional specialists across the country to learn more about educators' views of the Common Core Standards and their readiness to put them into practice. The survey reported that overall respondents were more likely to have participated in professional development on the Common Core (87 percent in 2013 compared to 71 percent a year earlier).[9] While a large majority of educators have received some training related to the Common Core, of all respondents 68 percent indicates that they want more professional development on the Common Core.

In "An Art Teacher's Perspective: The Value of Museum Resources to the Common Core," Chrissy Gray-Rodriguez, a Chicago Public School art teacher, describes her relationship with museums, and her use of museum resources and professional development workshops to strengthen her ability to integrate Common Core Standards into her — and her colleagues' — teaching.

This guest-edited section provides a snapshot of how museums are responding to the Common Core Standards. Our focus is on museums and schools, museum educators, and classroom teachers. The important role of parents' and community members' involvement in Common Core Standards are outside of the scope of this discussion.

In a recent *JME* article, museum educator Ben Garcia pointed out that museums often struggle to achieve a good balance of open-ended learning with pre-set school agendas.[10] The Common Core State Standards allows museum educators to find that balance. It is important for us to continue embracing museums' intrinsic power of self-exploratory learning while supporting students and teachers as schools, and what they teach, evolve.

Notes

1 "About the Standards," Common Core State Standards Initiative, accessed May 10, 2015, http ://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/

2 National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, *Common Core State Standards* (Washington, DC: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

3 Education Week Research Center, *Findings from a National Survey: From Adoption to Practice: Teacher Perspectives on the Common Core* (Bethesda, MD: Editorial Projects in Education, Inc., 2014).

4 Erik W. Robelen, "Arts Education Seen as Common-Core Partner," *Education Week,* December 12, 2012, accessed December 13, 2014, http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2012/12/12/14arts. h32.html; David Coleman, "Common Core Architect Adds to Blog Salon Discussion," *ARTSblog,* September 17, 2012, http://blog.artsusa.org/2012/09/17/ common-core-architect-adds-to-blog-salon-discussion/.

5 National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, *Common Core State Standards English Language Arts* (Washington, DC: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

6 Allie Bidwell, "The Politics of Common Core," *U.S. News,* March 6, 2014, accessed December 13, 2014, http://www.usnews.com/news/special-reports/a-guide-to-common-core/articles/ 2014/03/06/the-politics-of-common-core?int=9e2d08; Linda Lutton, "Chicago Teacher Unions Votes to Oppose Common Core," *WBEZ 91.5*, May 8, 2014, accessed December 13, 2014, http ://www.wbez.org/news/education/ chicago-teachers-union-votes-oppose-common-core-110152; Diane Ravitch, "Why Parents Hate the Common Core," *CNN,* November 25, 2013, accessed December 13, 2014, http://www. cnn.com/2013/11/25/opinion/ravitch-common-core-standards/; Stan Karp, "The Problem with the Common Core," *Rethinking Schools* 28, no. 2, Winter 2013/2014, accessed January 3, 2015, http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/28_02/28_02_karp.shtml.

7 "Defending the Common Core school standards," last modified May 19, 2014, http://articles. chicagotribune.com/2014-05-19/opinion/ ct-defending-common-core-edit-jm-20140519_1_common-core-standards-isat.

8 Jay McTighe and Grant Wiggins, *From Common Core Standards to Curriculum: Five Big Ideas*, 2012, p. 2, accessed November 29, 2014, http://grantwiggins.files.wordpress.com/2012/09/ mctighe_wiggins_final_common_core_standards.pdf

9 Jennie Magierra, "What Makes Me Open My Wallet to PD," *Education Week*, January 12, 2014, http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_toward_tomorrow/2014/01/ what_makes_me_open_my_wallet_t.html.

10 Ben Garcia, "What We Do Best: Making the Case for the Museum Learning in Its Own Right," *The Journal of Museum Education* 27, no. 2 (2012): 47–55.

About the Guest Editor

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