

This article was downloaded by: [Christopher H. Tienken]

On: 31 October 2012, At: 08:54

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Kappa Delta Pi Record

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ukdr20>

### The Common Core State Standards: The Emperor Is Still Looking for His Clothes

Christopher H. Tienken<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Seton Hall University in the College of Education and Human Services, Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy

To cite this article: Christopher H. Tienken (2012): The Common Core State Standards: The Emperor Is Still Looking for His Clothes, Kappa Delta Pi Record, 48:4, 152-155

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00228958.2012.733928>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

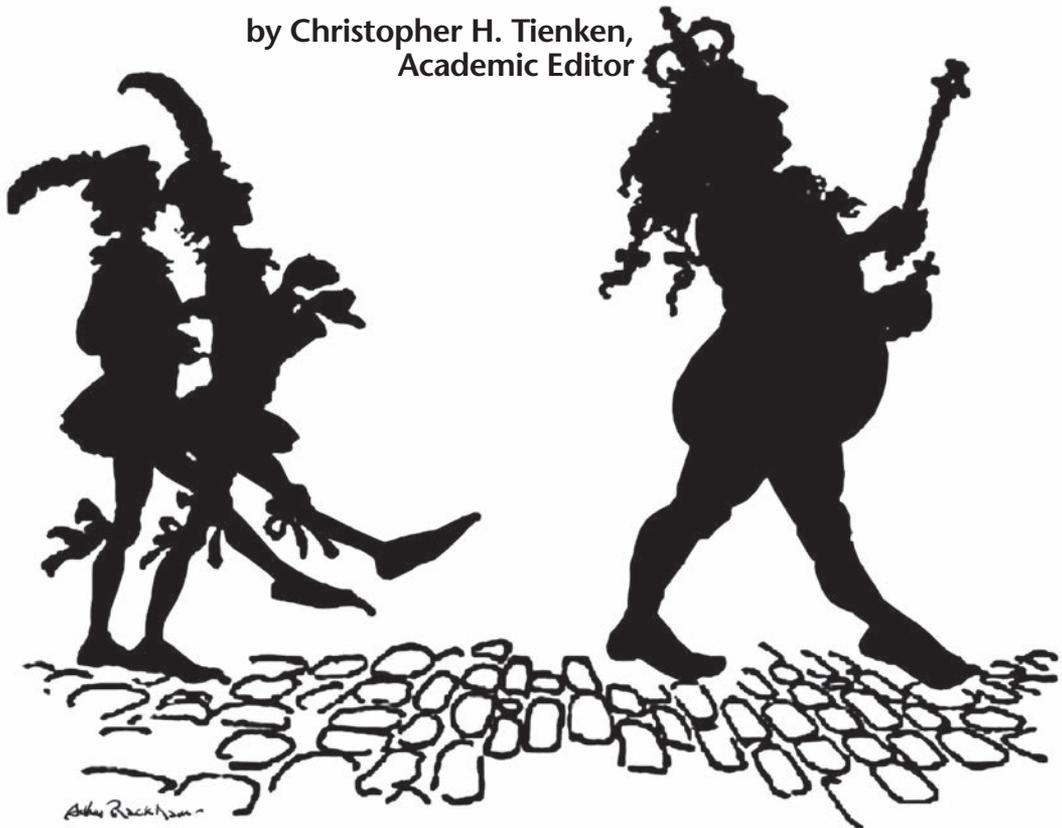
The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

## For the Record

*Kappa Delta Pi Record*, 48: 152–155, 2012  
Copyright © Kappa Delta Pi  
ISSN: 0022-8958 print/2163-1611 online  
DOI 10.1080/00228958.2012.733928

# The Common Core State Standards: The **EMPEROR** Is **Still Looking** for His **CLOTHES**

by Christopher H. Tienken,  
Academic Editor



**Christopher H. Tienken**  
is an Assistant Professor at  
Seton Hall University in the  
College of Education and  
Human Services, Department  
of Education Leadership,  
Management, and Policy.  
He is a former public school  
teacher and administrator.  
You can contact him at  
[christopher.tienken@shu.edu](mailto:christopher.tienken@shu.edu).

As of September 2012, only Alaska, Minnesota, Nebraska, Texas, and Virginia had not adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Yet empirical evidence that demonstrates

the efficacy of the initiative remains elusive. The Emperor has no clothes (Tienken 2011a). This latest installment of standardization and centralization of curriculum and assessment

could be one of the largest social experiments undertaken on children, who are compelled to participate. Some have gone as far to describe the de facto nationalization of public schooling as the Stalinization of education (Baines 2011).

Recently, two reports purported to demonstrate the efficacy of the CCSS surfaced. Could these reports be the pants and shirt the Emperor needs? Unfortunately, the reports suffer from methodological flaws that call into question the claims made by the authors. In this article, I briefly critique the latest reports on the CCSS and provide evidence on why the Emperor is still running around naked.

## We Are Reaching Here

I documented in previous articles that the lack of empirical evidence to support the CCSS and national testing is stunning and should give pause to the public. Educators, in particular, should expect scientific evidence, given that they work in a profession based on knowledge derived from science (Tienken 2011a, 2011b; Tienken and Zhao 2010). David Conley from the University of Oregon and his colleagues, contributors to the CCSS, published two reports that claim to demonstrate that the CCSS are research-based and superior to state standards. The reports conclude that the CCSS will produce the positive effects that vendors claim.

In effect, Conley et al. attempt to provide the science. However, the results from *Reaching the Goal: The Applicability and Importance of the Common Core State Standards to College and Career Readiness* (Conley et al. 2011a) and *Lining Up: The Relationship between the Common Core State Standards and Five Sets of Comparison Standards* (Conley et al. 2011b) actually suggest otherwise. The results from *Reaching the Goal* were supposed to demonstrate that the CCSS will prepare students to be college and career ready. But that is not the case.

The research team conducted a national survey of about 1,600 college professors who taught specific content in various majors such as English Language Arts (ELA), Healthcare, Mathematics, Technology, and Science. Participants were asked to rate the importance of selected CCSS to their courses. No standards

other than the CCSS were included in the study: There was no control group of other standards. Therefore, we don't know whether other sets of standards could have rated as high as or higher than the CCSS.

Another weakness of the methodology was the assumption that college professors should have the final say on what gets taught in third grade, or middle school, or even high school. Elementary school is not college, and K-12 school students should not be treated as mini-adults. Psychology research from the last 100 years tells us they are not adults (Piaget 1963; Erikson 1968; Kohlberg 1970). There is great danger when people ascribe adult qualities to children and then force them to learn like adults or learn content as if they are going to be experts in that field. We have been here before, and the story does not end well. Why are we being forced to read the book again?

This worn-out view of education harkens back to Jerome Bruner (1960) and the Scholar Academic philosophy that pervaded education after the launch of Sputnik. That kind of ideology gave us math and science curriculum in which students were supposed to learn mathematics as if they were going to be mathematicians, and they were to learn science as if they were going to be scientists. There was intense specializing within the subjects. Math was math and that did not transfer to ELA, and vice versa. Transfer was not the purpose. Specialization within a subject was the purpose, and the results from *Reaching the Goal* seem to suggest that we have once again gone back to the future: A return to a narrow subject-centered curriculum versus transfer of knowledge through interdisciplinary and problem-based curriculum. Not exactly the pair of pants I was hoping for.

## Lining 'em Up

In the second study, *Lining Up* (Conley et al. 2011b), the researchers compared the scope of the CCSS to five other sets of standards. They chose standards from California, Massachusetts, Texas, Knowledge and Skills for University Success (of which David Conley is the director), and the International Baccalaureate (IB). Amazingly, the results suggested strong alignment to

## For the Record

the first four sets of existing standards, and only moderate alignment to the IB program standards. Couple these findings with the results from Reed (2010), in which he found that by Grade 8, the variance in state standards almost disappears and all state standards are almost identical in their expectations for children.

Therefore, one could conclude that if state standards are almost identical by Grade 8, and the CCSS align with three state standards, then the CCSS are not that much different from the state standards we already have in the United States. In essence, then, by Grade 8 all states' standards are also college and career ready, and the IB standards are the least so? These findings seem to contradict two arguments made in favor of the CCSS: There is too much variance in current state standards, and current state standards are not college and career ready. Unfortunately for the Emperor, this shirt is not going to fit.

### Conflict of Interest

The research by Conley et al. (2011a; 2011b) also raises the appearance of some conflicts of interest. This is not to say that anyone conspired to do anything nefarious. Not at all. But generally speaking, large social programs should have research to support them prior to being released large-scale on the public. That research should be independent and not created by one or more of the contributors to the program that is released. Neither of those things happened in this case.

### Has Anyone Seen My Clothes?

Where is the evidence? The assertion that one curriculum can prepare all students for any college or career lacks face validity and defies logic (Zhao 2012). It seems as if this Emperor will be forever naked. More than 100 years ago, society learned the deleterious effects that a single curriculum, linked to college admissions, can have on high school graduation and college attendance, when fewer than 5 percent of students actually graduated from high school and even fewer went on to college (U.S. Department of Interior 1928).

It was not until more flexible and student-

centered curricula were introduced into the system, along with the birth of the comprehensive high school that offered multiple pathways through high school, did graduation rates begin to rise quickly (Conant 1967). The U.S. public school system now ranks 8th in the world for on-time graduation and 2nd in the world, behind only Ireland, for total percentage of students who complete high school (Organization for Co-Operation and Economic Development 2011).

### Ready for What?

It is dangerously naïve and professionally irresponsible to think that one set of standards, based solely on two subjects, can prepare children to access the thousands of college options or even make them attractive to the admissions officers that control access to those options. For example, is it crucial that all students master the following CCSS English Language Arts standard RI.9-10.7 (Council of Chief State School Officers and National Governors Association [NGA] 2010)?

*Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person's life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.*

By mastery, I mean that all students can do this correctly on May 6, or whatever day the national test is administered.

If a student cannot perform a specific standard to mastery on the one day of the national test, does that mean the student should not be admitted to one of the more than 4,400 colleges in the United States? Does it mean that the student will never be able to "master" that standard? Does it matter whether the student takes until age 25 to possibly master the standard? Where is the evidence that being able to master such a standard predicts the student's ability to be a productive member of society? Is that standard necessary for every high-quality job opportunity? What are students missing by being forced to focus so heavily on the limited curricula possibilities provided by the CCSS?

## What You Can Do

### Career Ready

There are endless career options for students. How can one curriculum prepare every student for any one career? Where is the evidence to support that assertion? How can it be that future plumbers, information technology personnel, graphic designers, certified auto mechanics, pastry chefs, entrepreneurs, teachers, home health aides, commercial airline pilots, or the tens-of-thousands of other possible careers—some of which have not even been invented yet—require mastery of the same one-size-fits-all curriculum? I don't want my auto mechanic to have mastery of the same exact content and set of skills as my website designer, my accountant, or my university department chair. I want cognitive diversity.

Where is the evidence that the CCSS will lead to a student being able to pursue any career on the globe, as is claimed by the NGA? There is none. A check of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012) projections of the 20 jobs that will account for the greatest numbers of job opportunities for Americans in 2020 seems to indicate a need for a diverse set of skills: a cognitively nimble citizenry. Most of the jobs in 2020 projected to employ the largest numbers of people do not require a four-year college degree.

### Get That Man Some Pants!

The Emperor still does not have clothes (Tienken 2011a). 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. The CCSS are stuck in place, looking back at the world the way it used to be: Curricular quicksand, if you will. Our children deserve better than rhetoric based on bankrupt ideology, and educators have a duty to require and provide it. ■

### References

- Baines, L. 2011. Stalinizing American education. *Teachers College Record*, September 16. Available at: [www.tcrecord.org](http://www.tcrecord.org).  
 Bruner, J. S. 1960. *The process of education*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.  
 Conant, J. B. 1967. *The comprehensive high school: A second report to*

Dissect the standards at your grade level:

- Identify the specific learning objectives embedded in each standard. There are multiple objectives in each standard not identified by the vendors of the CCSS.
- Determine which of those objectives that your current students, the ones that sit in front of you, will have difficulty learning.
- Scaffold additional concrete, hands-on activities into your local curriculum to provide your students with the extra support necessary.

Create authentic, interesting activities, based on socially conscious problems of interest to your students to enhance their engagement.

- interested citizens*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Conley, D. T., K. V. Drummond, A. de Gonzalez, J. Rooseboom, and O. Stout. 2011a. *Reaching the goal: The applicability and importance of the Common Core State Standards to college and career readiness*. Eugene, OR: Educational Policy Improvement Center.
- Conley, D. T., K. V. Drummond, A. de Gonzalez, J. Rooseboom, and O. Stout. 2011b. *Lining up: The relationship between the Common Core State Standards and five sets of comparison standards*. Eugene, OR: Educational Policy Improvement Center.
- Council of Chief State School Officers and National Governors Association. 2010. English language arts standards, *Common Core State Standards initiative*. Washington, DC: CCSSO and NGA. Available at: [www.corestandards.org/the-standards/english-language-arts-standards/reading-informational-text-6-12/grade-9-10](http://www.corestandards.org/the-standards/english-language-arts-standards/reading-informational-text-6-12/grade-9-10).
- Erikson, E. H. 1968. *Identity, youth, and crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Kohlberg, L. 1970. Education for justice. In *Moral education*, ed. J. M. Gustafson, 57–65. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Organization for Co-Operation and Economic Development. 2011. *Education at a glance 2011: OECD indicators*. Paris, France: OECD. Available at: [www.oecd.org/edu/highereducationandadultlearning/educationataglance2011oecdindicators.htm#Data](http://www.oecd.org/edu/highereducationandadultlearning/educationataglance2011oecdindicators.htm#Data).
- Piaget, J. 1963. *The origins of intelligence in children*, trans. M. Cook. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Reed, D. S. 2010. Great (and not so great) expectations: The demographics of proficiency cut scores. *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* 7(3): 37–48.
- Tienken, C. H. 2011a. Common Core State Standards: The emperor has no clothes, or evidence. *Kappa Delta Pi Record* 47(2): 58–62.
- Tienken, C. H. 2011b. Common Core State Standards: An example of data-less decision making. *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* 7(4): 3–18.
- Tienken, C. H., and Y. Zhao. 2010. Common core national curriculum standards: More questions . . . and answers. *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice* 6(4): 3–13.
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. 2012. Employment projections. Washington, DC: BLS. Available at: [www.bls.gov/emp/tables.htm](http://www.bls.gov/emp/tables.htm).
- U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Education. 1928. *Cardinal principles of secondary education: A report of the Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, Appointed by the National Education Association*. Bulletin 1918, No. 35. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Zhao, Y. 2012. *World class learners: Educating creative and entrepreneurial students*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

The opinions expressed in this editorial are those of the author and do not reflect any official position of Kappa Delta Pi, International Honor Society in Education.