When we teach prospective teachers, we present *curriculum* as a set of decisions, decisions that are neither objective nor value-neutral. Curriculum decisions are made in social, cultural, and political contexts that involve contested perspectives about the purposes of education.

Standards, as curricular aims, are similar. They reflect and emphasize principles and ideals determined by their creators. When standards are developed, alternative perspectives and beliefs are omitted. Before they are accepted and implemented as the basis for a national curriculum, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) must be considered with these ideas in mind. With respect to the Common Core, it is important for educators to consider these questions: *Where did they come from?* and *Where are they going?*

Although there is much to be concerned about whenever a curriculum is standardized, nationalized, and mandated, our concerns about the Common Core are not primarily related to content. The document itself is of far less concern to us than its genesis and its prospects. This past-future duality is where the perils of the Common Core lie; therefore, it is critical to examine its source and where it is leading.

As a tool for planning instruction, the CCSS may seem innocuous—and even beneficial. However, like any tool, the standards require critical analysis before being used. Therefore, educators must ask: Who made this tool and why? Who paid for its design, construction, and distribution? Was it developed under conditions of brutality and oppression, or was it created in a collaborative, participatory manner?

These questions matter because standards, curricula, and pedagogy form an ongoing circle of teaching and learning. Each informs the others, and all must be developed concurrently, through a recursive process. Furthermore, the concept of one set of standards implies that all human problems are essentially technical in nature and can be solved through technical means. That is, the creation and adoption of the CCSS implies that there is one right, best way and that it just needs to be identified and scaled up. “Scaling up” means developing practices that can be broken into small component parts that can then be implemented widely, very likely through scripted lessons or modules. This perspective and purpose was revealed in 2009 by the major underwriter of the CCSS, Bill Gates, who said at a speech to the National Conference of State Legislatures:

Fortunately, the state-led Common Core State Standards Initiative is developing clear, rigorous common standards that match the best in the world. Last month, 46 Governors and Chief State School Officers made a public commitment to embrace these common standards.

This is encouraging—but identifying common standards is not enough. We’ll know we’ve succeeded when the curriculum and the tests are aligned to these standards.

Secretary Arne Duncan recently announced that $350 million of the stimulus package will be used to create just these kinds of tests—next-generation assessments aligned to the common core.

When the tests are aligned to the common standards, the curriculum will line up as well—and that will unleash powerful market forces in
From the Editors

Like a pen, the Common Core is a tool. We love to write but wouldn’t choose to use a pen that was assembled by an imprisoned child. And, despite its sharp point, we do not intend to use our pen to puncture someone’s eyeball.

Standards, like any tool, embody and promote values and beliefs. In this issue, authors explore the development and implementation of standards and what they mean for students and learning. As the cover image suggests, teaching and learning are organic activities. Standards can support growth and nurture learning. Standardization, on the other hand, can undermine the human relationships that are central to the act of teaching. When standards are coupled with standardization, the result is decay.

We hope this issue will help you breathe life into your classroom by opening spaces for discussion, deliberation, and dissent.

Work Cited


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