

On Being Career Ready: Whose Career Is It Anyway?

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The Common Core State Standards document (CCSS) states:

[College and Career Ready] students are engaged and open-minded—but discerning—readers and listeners. They work diligently to understand precisely what an author or speaker is saying, but they also question an author’s or speaker’s assumptions and premises and assess the veracity of claims and the soundness of reasoning.

Being a discerning reader of the CCSS, I love the idea of being *career ready*, it sounds great. But I am left pondering the question, “To which careers are we referring?” I agree that the CCSS, if met, would actually allow for a graduating senior to be ready for virtually any field.

But there is a catch. I don’t see how there would be enough time across a K-12 learning curve for a student to become deeply engaged in any discipline within a school such that the student could gain a sense of mastery of a discipline, craft, artistic or athletic pursuit...with the obvious exceptions of language arts and math, the primary subjects of the standards themselves.

The focus on the use of language and numbers as important tools for expression within an educated society is understandable. But what of experiencing creative processes using other tools? What of practicing critical thinking with other tools? What about the sensory tools available to students?

For example, why not teach students to see deeply when looking at a piece of artwork? Yes, of course they would need language to discuss what they saw, but what if they chose to dance their reaction? Would this form of expression be any less valid than an essay? Not to me. It would not, however, give the student the appearance of being college and career ready according to the CCSS. What if that career choice was professional dancer?

Where is the one standard that matters in every grade: “The student will learn to enjoy school, get to choose areas of study aligned with their particular interests, have the opportunity to pursue those interests, (and I will add for the CCSS devotees in the audience), *and receive training in ELA and math that relate to that particular interest and via that particular field of study*”?

Significant dropout rates exist in every city across the country, yet the CCSS standards ultimately only apply to those who make it through all 13 years of school. Are we somehow endorsing potentially driving kids away from school by a continued hyper-focus on standardized testing to which the CCSS will likely lead, even though CCSS authors have yet to state their assessment model?

The result could very well be a two-class society, the educated and the substantially less educated, and potentially continue a growing class division between the rich and poor. Is this

really what we want our public school system to be about? Is our ultimate national goal to catch Finland, Singapore and South Korea in our test scores?

I hope not. I hope we can offer greater choice and opportunity for students to learn language and math skills through other subjects that are far more inclusive than the ones the CCSS mentions, even having given a cursory nod to history, science, and social studies.

I hope we can someday make our national education goals more student-centric and more individualized, respecting the diversity of talents and intelligences, and the history of free and creative expression of the individual and their ideas, that has always been at the forefront of American creativity and productivity.

The CCSS train has left the station and we apparently have little choice but to get on board. But what are we going to do to maintain the rest of our curricular options for kids and respect the multiple intelligences that children bring to the classroom? That's a question artists and art teachers need to keep in the forefront of the CCSS discussion.