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A blog of the National Institute
for Early Education Research

Top concerns about Common Core State Standards in early childhood education

April 2015

A forum of blog posts from early childhood education
experts, with selected resources

Editor: Kirsty Clarke Brown

Table of Contents

The CCSS don't say we should exclude the play.....	6
5 Responses to <i>The CCSS don't say we should exclude the play</i>	8
The good, the bad, and the solution.....	11
Collaboration and complexity	14
Parents just don't understand . . .and for good reason!.....	17
Teachers discussing assessment in preschool	21
One Response to <i>Teachers discussing assessment in preschool</i>	23
The Common Core State Standards are not a curriculum.....	25
2 Responses to <i>The Common Core State Standards are not a curriculum</i>	28
Why CCSS-M Grades K-3 is developmentally appropriate and internationally competitive.....	29
2 Responses to <i>Why CCSS-M Grades K-3 is developmentally appropriate and internationally competitive</i>	32
What is Developmentally Appropriate Math?	34
We are all teachers and learners	43
Common Core and DAP: Seeking clarity	46
The Common Core State Standards in early childhood education: Summary	49
One Response to <i>The Common Core State Standards in early childhood education: Summary</i>	52
Selected Related Resources	55

Top concerns about Common Core State Standards in early childhood education

There's been lots of discussion about the Common Core State Standards recently, and their impact on classroom activity and child outcomes. Common Core is a major policy initiative to reform K-12 classroom practices, raise expectations and implement a new generation of assessments (at least in grades 3 and up), so it has major implications for Kindergarten-3rd grade (and early childhood education) teachers, children, and parents. It must be examined critically and debated. As we know, even if the policy is sound, implementation matters.



A recurring concern is that the Common Core State Standards were developed from the top-down (setting standards for 12th graders first, and then working backwards to set expectations for the lower grades, failing to take sufficient account of research-based learning progressions for children from birth-age 5. A related issue: Some feel there was insufficient involvement of early childhood research experts in language, literacy, mathematics, and child development in the standards development process.

Over the next few weeks, we plan to have experts comment on the top concerns and issues we've heard about CCSS.

- Rigorous standards may lead to reduced play and rich activity in preschool and Kindergarten classrooms.
- Literacy instruction may become limited to a few texts and drill-and-kill teaching.
- The standards are complex and extensive, and there is little guidance for teachers to implement them in Kindergarten classrooms.
- Parents don't understand the CCSS and are concerned about what they mean for their children.
- The Kindergarten standards for literacy are not appropriate for children that age.
- Assessment related to reaching standards will not be developmentally appropriate, and results may be misused.
- Alignment with K-12 standards will mean teaching methods, subjects, and assessments that are not developmentally appropriate will be pushed down to preschool levels.
- Math standards will be too challenging for young children.

We welcome your participation as well. Please comment and weigh in on the concerns and our experts' responses. Link to post [here](#).

--Kirsty Clarke Brown, Editor

3 Responses to *Top concerns about Common Core State Standards in early childhood education*

1. Dana Doyle says:

[March 27, 2015 at 9:53 pm America/New York-5](#)

As an early childhood trainer and consultant, I currently train on how to implement the Pre-k CC standards in a play-based, DAP fashion. For the most part, I think it can be done. But there definitely needs to be some "tweaking". The MAJOR problem and disconnect is regarding what we KNOW "kindergarten readiness" is SUPPOSED to look like (based on PROVEN research), and what is actually EXPECTED. Is "kindergarten" expecting more than what is developmentally appropriate or are parents misinformed? Either way....the children are suffering. Even "the standards" do not dictate inappropriate practice. So...why do we do what we KNOW is WRONG?



2. **MarkWFCondon** says:

[March 31, 2015 at 11:10 am America/New York-5](#)

In this conversation, let's also consider that if we don't include children's affective development in our discussions we are likely to lose the handle on the entire idea of developmentally appropriate experiences for small children. My field is literacy. Continuation of the focus only on "achievement" yields instruction that ignores teaching children to love books and reading. This should come prior to and then along with teaching them to read. Without that, we are likely to continue the flat line in reading achievement we've seen for over that last 20 years. Targeting 3rd grade reading scores when our little ones are still in diapers will do nothing in the long run for the kids and provide nothing for gaining the ultimate achievement of literacy, lifelong reading that becomes lifelong learning.

3. **Ellen Jaffe Cogan** says:

[April 26, 2015 at 1:35 pm America/New York-5](#)

The Kindergarten standards include some physically inappropriate provisions, particularly about writing, with which many children of that age struggle. Finger muscles are not fully developed for writing sentences and paragraphs until the second grade, particularly for boys. Early Childhood development people MUST be allowed to recommend Developmentally Appropriate tweaks to the Common Core.

There is no rush to push early reading – early play and investigative experiences which include literacy components are much more suited to children's development and will allow gains that are far more lasting.

The CCSS don't say we should exclude the play

March 30, 2015

The first [responses](#) addressing concerns about CCSS in early childhood education are from ***Kathleen A. Paciga***, *Columbia College Chicago*; ***Jessica L. Hoffman***, *Winton Woods City School District*; and ***William H. Teale***, *University of Illinois at Chicago*.

Rigorous standards may lead to reduced play and rich activity in preschool and Kindergarten classrooms.

There is no reason on earth that more rigorous early literacy standards should lead to reduced play in preschool and kindergarten. But there *has* been a dramatic decrease in the amount of “play” time in early education contexts (e.g., Frost, 2012; [Gray, 2011](#); [Sofield, 2013](#)).



The CCSS make no specific mention of play, nor do they specify the methods through which kindergartners are to demonstrate meeting the standards, so why is there a flood of commentary from practitioners (e.g., [Cox, n.d.](#); [Holland, 2015](#)), professional organizations and advocates (e.g., [Carlsson-Paige, McLaughlin, & Almon, 2015](#); [Nemeth, 2012](#); Paciga, Hoffman & Teale, 2011[1]), larger media hubs (e.g., [Kenny, 2013](#)), and parents, too, about the role of play (and the lack of it) in early education since the release of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010?

We suspect it is a combination of several influences, two of which are especially pertinent to our comments here. One relates to the points we made about “drill and kill” instruction. The specificity and ramped-up expectations of the CCSS have prompted many administrators to issue mandates to spend X number of minutes teaching Y. The misconception here lies in what constitutes teaching in an early childhood classroom. The CCSS don’t really discuss play, one way or the other. But the experiences with language and literacy that young children need, and the freedom for discussion and exploration that play allows, are critically important. Dramatic play with embedded literacy props and language interactions; retelling stories through flannel boards and puppets; or, making characters from clay and discussing them; writing stories, lists, and letters; composing signs for structures created with blocks—these and other play-related activities offer so much more in the way of developmentally appropriate opportunities to teach the concepts and skills embodied in the CCSS.

The other—related—factor contributing to reduced play and rich activity is a topic that has been discussed in early childhood education for the past 30 years: the push down of the curriculum from the later primary grades into earlier education. Add to that the recent emphasis on Value-Added-Measures (VAM) for teacher evaluation and, voila, we find in K and pre-K increased emphasis on narrowly focused skills such as phonemic awareness, alphabet knowledge, phonics, and sight word recognition that are susceptible to being measured by standardized assessments. The trouble is that these skills can be taught without embedding them in a rich play context, and too often administrators are more worried about scores to prove value added, than about

ensuring that children have deep understanding of both foundational and higher level understandings in early literacy.

As Pondiscio (2015) points out, "No one wants to see academic pressure bearing down on kindergarteners. That would only lead to uninterested children and with dim reading prospects. But focusing on language in kindergarten does not entail diminished play-based learning." As early childhood professionals, we need to emphasize that our objection is to the administrative recommendations for how we prepare children for mandated assessments, rather than (1) including reading, writing, and language-based experiences in our school day, or (2) on the absence of play-based literacy learning...because the CCSS don't say we should exclude the play.

[1] Paciga, K.A., Hoffman, J.L. & Teale, W.H. (2011). The National Early Literacy Panel Report and classroom instruction: Green lights, caution lights, and red lights. *Young Children*, 66 (6), 50-57.

5 Responses to *The CCSS don't say we should exclude the play*



1. **Fran Simon** says:

[March 30, 2015 at 11:27 am America/New York-5](#) [\(Edit\)](#)

For me as an industry watcher, I see that practitioners look for easy answers to complicated problems. Due to demand, early education suppliers and publishers are responding with didactic, drill and kill (posed as "fun and engaging") products and curricula. They are often designed as cleverly disguised worksheets and scripted lessons. The educational and consumer technology industry are among the worst offenders, offering up banal online activities (through apps and software as a service products) masked with mesmerizing animation that supposedly "teach Common Core Standards". What? Really? They "teach"? Even though I am an early education technology advocate (when it is used correctly), I know apps and software don't TEACH. They might (if they are good, and most are not good) support or extend learning that has been facilitated by teachers and parents, but they do not teach anything.

These companies actually drum up fear and speculation, in order to take capitalize. They began hyping CCSS years ago, well before CCSS began to even come close to impacting early education. I abhor the tactics these companies have used to incite fear and demand. And, I am sad that my field is so eager to find fast solutions. I blame us for being so pressured as to not look for better solutions, instead of purchasing products that promise to solve the problems quickly. If anyone or anything is guilty of squandering play, it is early educators who are intent on finding easy solutions.

So, do we blame the increase of standards? Are standards inherently bad? Or is it our reaction to standards that is to blame?

Fran Simon, M.Ed.

2. [Bob Sornson](#) says:

[March 30, 2015 at 12:56 pm America/New_York-5](#)

Educators and parents are concerned about the decrease in time for play for the simple reason that this trend has already emerged. Education policy continues to demand high-stakes standardized testing, which focuses on a narrow portion (academic) of the whole child, while neglecting the physical, social, self-regulatory, and artistic aspects of early childhood. Our present trajectory leads to less play, less joy, and more anxiety for children and educators.

Our continued reliance on a curriculum driven instructional system, and the overuse of standardized assessment to judge kids and adults, is a good example of how good intentions can pave the road to hell.

[Reply](#)

3. [Ellen De Huff](#) says:

[March 30, 2015 at 2:47 pm America/New_York-5](#)

How eloquently said, Bob. I had the pleasure of hearing you speak for the second time at Fairfield University last week. Since then I have had a couple of parents mention that

even at the Kindergarten level, the expectations are quite different than what we know to be true. The implementation of the CCSS has caused families to think that their children will not be well- prepared for what lies ahead, if we continue to promote play-based philosophies at our preschools.

My hope is that more people like you can convince parents, teachers, administrators and those that promote CCSS that this is a destructive path. Life skills and purposeful play are the ingredients that contribute to the kind of human beings we want our children to become!

o **[Bob Sornson](#)** says:

[March 31, 2015 at 8:59 am America/New York-5](#)

Ellen,

Thanks for your kind words. I continue to believe that good reasoning and sound educational practices will lead us to a better day for our children.

4. **[frosta2013](#)** says:

[March 30, 2015 at 7:13 pm America/New York-5](#)

Actually as any in the classroom early childhood teacher will tell you the CCSS don't have to address play to eliminate it. FACT when you are demanding mastery of cognitive academic tasks above a child's developmental level to meet some arbitrary standard play has to go because more time is required laying elaborate scaffolds in place and lots of repetitive practice to enable the child to master a skill long enough for testing. As a result of this time hog something has to go and in classrooms all over the country that is all forms of playtime. Skilled educators do craft highly structured activities that many confuse with play but research has repeatedly demonstrated that the more structured an activity becomes the less intrinsic motivation you get from the learner. The inappropriate pushdown academics designed in direct opposition and contradiction to over 60 years of longitudinal ECE research including more recent research in developmental psychology, neural science and cognitive research do not have to do a thing to eliminate play, they do so by their very existence.

The good, the bad, and the solution

April 1, 2015

The first [responses](#) addressing concerns about CCSS in early childhood education are from **Kathleen A. Paciga**, Columbia College Chicago; **Jessica L. Hoffman**, Winton Woods City School District; and **William H. Teale**, University of Illinois at Chicago.

Literacy instruction may become limited to a few texts and drill-and-kill teaching.

There are two issues embedded in this concern: (1) drill/didactic literacy teaching and (2) too few texts.

With respect to the concern about drill-and-kill teaching, we believe: That teachers should teach literacy in kindergarten. The CCSS propose a list of specific English/Language Arts concepts and skills that kindergartners should learn (and therefore teachers should teach).



Good news: The list includes both foundational and higher-level skills; and it encompasses not only reading, but also writing and a rather robust conception of oral language.

Potential bad news: Many educators look at the standards and conclude that the best way to effect children’s learning of them is to teach them—the interpretation of the word *teach* being sit them down and give them specific lessons on the specific skills so that they can practice and thereby learn those skills.

Problem: This conception of teaching is drill-and-kill. It is not even recommended on “constrained skills” of early literacy, such as alphabet knowledge and phonological awareness, and is totally useless for impacting “unconstrained skills” such as comprehension, composing in writing, or integrating knowledge and ideas.

Solution: As much as possible, embed intentional literacy instruction in the context of content-rich, meaningful activities (such as dramatic play, science activities, and thematic units like the Farm to Table example discussed in [Hoffman, et al. \(2014\)](#)).

Too few texts: Here’s the good news about the K-1 Text Exemplars (see [CCSS-ELA Appendix B](#)): the stories, poetry, and read aloud selections listed there are, for the most part, high quality literature (“text selections...worth reading and re-reading” that “will encourage students and teachers to dig more deeply into their meanings than they would with lower quality material”), and they are also works that would be engaging to many kindergartners. Here’s the bad news about those exemplars:

- They are unacceptably under-representative of multicultural literature and international literature for U.S. children.
- They are prone to be regarded as “the Common Core texts we need to include in our program.” (We have repeatedly seen instances of school administrators purchasing the list of books included in Appendix B.) This is very problematic, as the CCSS do intend that

these particular books serve as the basis for the curriculum, and there are SO many other books available that can more appropriately be used, depending on the particular school in question.

- Far too many kindergarten teachers have little knowledge of children's literature, and the CCSS provide no resources for them to use in selecting books beyond the few text exemplars included

Collaboration and complexity

April 3, 2015

The first [responses](#) addressing concerns about CCSS in early childhood education are from **Kathleen A. Paciga**, Columbia College Chicago; **Jessica L. Hoffman**, Winton Woods City School District; and **William H. Teale**, University of Illinois at Chicago.

Concern: The standards are complex and extensive, and there is little guidance for teachers to implement them in Kindergarten classrooms.

On the one hand, yes, the standards are “complex” in the sense that they are communicated in a complicated document that represents high-level goals for student learning. Furthermore, they do not prescribe how a teacher should actually teach each standard, which speaks to the issue of little guidance.

This lack of guidance has its downside: it can easily lead teachers to employ a didactic pedagogical approach to kindergarten literacy education, thinking that each standard is best “taught” directly, thus missing opportunities for authentic language and literary practices, embedded in activities with larger conceptual goals.

On the other hand, we have been quite *underwhelmed* by the lack of complexity of the learning expectations in a number of standards at the kindergarten level. Take for instance, Reading Standards for Literature Standard 6, “Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.” At the kindergarten level, the standard reads, “With prompting and support, name the author and illustrator of a story and define the role of each in telling the story,” which contributes almost nothing to the development of the anchor standard. We would support a higher standard to be achieved with support, such as, “With guidance and support, describe differences among characters’ points of view and how those differences affect character feelings and actions.”



The problem with a number of the kindergarten ELA standards is that they represent goals for *independent* mastery to be demonstrated by the end of the school year. Over-emphasis on what kindergartners are expected to do independently (or with minimal support) can easily translate into classroom practice narrowly focused on very basic skills (often unrelated to the anchor standards), with few of the higher-level foci of the anchor standards being modeled and supported in early education. There are many other places in the more complex strands of the standards where standards at the K level either: (1) do not include a grade level standard, or (2) “dumb down” what children are expected to do in K, even with adult support (see extended discussion and detailed examples in [Hoffman, Paciga, & Teale, 2014](#)).

To be clear, we are *not* arguing to up the ante for kindergarteners’ independent reading performance. However, we do argue strongly for upping their daily participation in collaborative experiences with

teachers and peers around complex literacy tasks that are better aligned to later grade level and anchor standards, e.g., modeling and discussion through think-alouds and guiding questions in interactive read-alouds of complex texts and shared writing activities. It is important to remember that students require much collaborative practice with complex literacies in early childhood before they will be able to demonstrate proficiency independently in later grades.

Parents just don't understand . . .and for good reason!

April 6, 2015

Vincent Costanza, Executive Director, Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge, New Jersey Department of Education, and parent, [responds](#) on the issue of **Parents don't understand the CCSS and are concerned about what they mean for their children.**

As a state policy maker, early childhood professional, and elected school board member in my home district, I participate in many discussions about the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). While it would be easy to go into educator or policy mode in addressing some of these questions, those perspectives dissipate and become subservient to my lens as a father of an 8-year-old girl.

Given the controversy that currently exists around CCSS and the associated assessments (a quick Google search will yield plenty of evidence for this) parents have plenty of reason to wonder what these standards are really about. While some of the commentary regarding the standards has been negative, as a parent, I search for someone to answer this question for me, "*Which standard should my daughter **not** be learning?*"

With the intense dialogue around the standards, it's often difficult to focus exactly on what the standards say and exactly what our children are expected to learn. Of course, this puts parents in a difficult position and makes it hard to ask the right questions, advocate for our children, and be true partners in the success of our children. With this said, there are two common and thoughtful questions I'm often asked by parents, friends, and family members alike, which I'll address below.

Where do these new standards come from?

First, the CCSS were established in back in 2010, so they are not exactly new. The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) led the development of the CCSS. Although a common



criticism is that the CCSS initiative is an attempt by the federal government to dictate education in states, such a sentiment is inaccurate. In fact, it was governors and state education Chiefs who recognized the economic reality that it makes no sense to have children throughout the country aiming for different sets of standards when our children will live in an increasingly flat country and world. After all, there's a good chance that some of the jobs in Seattle, for instance, will be filled by people from New Jersey. Does it really make sense for children throughout the country to have different learning targets?

What do the Standards require?

Unlike the “everything but the kitchen sink” approach of previous state standards (ask any stressed teacher who has needed to jam in lessons to cover standards how well this works for your child), the CCSS are much more focused and emphasize depth over breath. Moreover, as standards that set learning targets for our children, they are NOT a curriculum. Hence, the CCSS do ***not*** mandate how teachers must assist our children in meeting these targets.

This point is essential because there is much conversation regarding how the standards are curtailing the curricular offerings available to our children. This leads me to wonder, Did I miss something here? Were there grand curricular offerings before 2010? For instance, was there a proliferation of play-based learning experiences in kindergarten before these common standards? Did teachers organize their understandings of child development by systematically using performance-based and formative assessment? Although early childhood professionals have wanted quality adult-child interactions with meaningful investigations that teachers assess authentically since long before my kindergarten teacher days, there's plenty of evidence that this type of teaching hasn't happened for quite a while.

What these standards do provide is a "staircase" of increasing complexity with the goal that all children become college and career ready. As such, they offer a clear design, central goals, common language, and high standards. Cross-curricular teaching that emphasizes problem solving, persistence, abstract reasoning, and the ability to construct arguments and critique reasoning is at the core of these standards. Since I know a few adults who could use assistance with these skills, I'm assuming they were never given the chance to practice solving problems at an early age. I'm certainly happy that CCSS does this for our children.

A few important considerations

First, like ALL standards, these standards are not perfect. As an educator, I notice standards that children will undoubtedly struggle with in particular grade levels. For instance, I wonder how many children will not be able to do [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RF.K.2.D](#) in kindergarten:

Isolate and pronounce the initial, medial vowel, and final sounds (phonemes) in three-phoneme (consonant-vowel-consonant, or CVC) words.¹ (This does not include CVCs ending with /l/, /r/, or /x/.)

However, since some children will be able to do so easily, the question should focus on how teachers respond to children who experience the standards differently. Again, this is a question for all standards. Second, as an early childhood professional, I remain concerned that CCSS only represents two domains of development. How teachers integrate and simply appreciate other domains of learning and development, such as Social-Emotional Development and Approaches toward Learning, needs much more conversation.

Lastly, as a parent, I wonder how the curriculum my daughter experiences daily, fits in, and aligns to CCSS. I understand that CCSS is *not* a curriculum, but there's plenty of reason to believe that work needs to be done on the curricular front.

Given the volume of conflicting information that exists around CCSS, below are some resources that can help arm parents to ask the best questions and be the best advocates for children. The way that this initiative is implemented will shape the academic careers of a generation of children, my 8-year-old included. Now *those* are high stakes!

Resources

<http://www.cgcs.org/domain/36>

<http://www.corestandards.org/what-parents-should-know/>

<http://www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2583>

<http://www.naeyc.org/topics/common-core>

Teachers discussing assessment in preschool

April 8, 2015

This [response](#) is by **Randi Weingarten**, President, American Federation of Teachers.

Assessment related to reaching standards will not be developmentally appropriate, and results may be misused.

I sat down with a group of prekindergarten educators in New York City recently to [talk](#) about how they assess how their students are doing. The conversation began slowly. A few mentioned that they feel overwhelmed by the many different assessments they are asked to use; others noted how they feel pressure to be sure that these assessments show that their kids are ready for kindergarten. “We know that these kids have to be at a certain level in kindergarten,” said Zara Ziff, a teacher for the past 11 years. “Every time we turn around, we’re assessing them.”



Then the conversation turned to play-based learning. It was as if someone had flipped a light switch. Around the table, faces lit up—voices lifted in animated, excited tones. To see the joy flooding the room made me think of how much joy these teachers infuse in their students when they are able to guide them with developmentally appropriate activities that meet them where they are.

“For some of them, the only way they know how to express themselves right now is through playing,” said Angela Russell, a teacher for the past 10 years.

“They express themselves without fear,” said Norah Edwards, a 29-year veteran teacher.

Play helps their students learn how to communicate, how to work in teams, how to solve problems. And it helps educators understand what their students are learning.

“Play is so important because not every kid is going to want to come in here and just start drawing and writing and learning numbers. Some kids come in and don’t even know how to behave when their parents aren’t around, and they get scared because their moms aren’t there,” said Gyasi Daniel, a pre-K para-educator. “When you’re playing with them, they get comfortable, they get adjusted to school—and they say, I can be myself here. That’s what is really important about pre-K.”

Years of research shows that the best way to assess the progress of our early learners is through the expertise of teachers who know how to observe and interpret young children’s activities and behavior. Yet early childhood educators are being forced by states across the country to use what they perceive as developmentally inappropriate practices in these crucial early learning years under the guise of needing to prepare for K-3 Common Core assessments.

According to those I spoke with in New York City, play-based learning should comprise up to 60 percent of the school day. Instead, they are finding that testing-based assessments are taking up more and more

of their time. Angela noted that she is currently using three assessments with her students.

The AFT is working to help educators like Zara, Angela, Norah, and Gyasi infuse a joy of learning in our youngest learners by keeping standardized tests out of our pre-K through second-grade classrooms. At the same time, we are working to ensure that early childhood educators are included in all conversations about the rollout and implementation of the Common Core—to ensure that the needs of our youngest learners are addressed.

We believe that assessments should be used to help teachers take an inventory at the launch of the school year to find out where their students are starting from, so they can then shape their instruction to get them where they need to go, as Norah suggested.

Ultimately, we need to put our teachers in the driver’s seat and help them to infuse our youngest learners with a lifelong love of learning—and we need to ensure that any and all assessments don’t get in the way of that.

“You want all children to have a love of learning,” said Karen Alford, vice president for elementary schools of the United Federation of Teachers. “It begins here in pre-K. That’s why play is so important. The hands-on experiential learning is so valuable. They will get to the pencils and the bubble test. That will come. But this is the foundation.”

AFT President Randi Weingarten visited PS 184 in Brooklyn to attend a launch event for a new toolkit for staff and families: [Transitioning to Kindergarten](#). For more information, visit the [AFT’s early childhood Web page](#).

One Response to *Teachers discussing assessment in preschool*



1. [Fran Simon](#) says:
[April 8, 2015 at 10:53 am America/New York-5](#)

I can't help but wonder what type of assessments these early childhood teachers are being compelled to use. Because they are determined at the state level, expectations and regulations for early care and education settings are fragmented and it becomes hard to decipher the problem.

My guess is that the teachers featured in this post are being required to conduct summative assessments, which are not appropriate for young children. In this case, I suggest that rather than fighting against "any and all assessments", ATF should advocate to influence states to require only one developmentally appropriate observation-based formative assessment statewide. There is no reason teachers should have to sacrifice play because they are being required to use a reasonable and DAP assessment system (provided that the teachers are well-trained to use it.) Observation-based formative assessment is based on watching children do their thing—play.

When we set out to fight against standards and assessment, we demonstrate that the field is out of step with reality. Are we really concerned about the death of play, or do we resist for other reasons? When we assert that every new standard and every new assessment means we can't offer time for children to play, we minimize our ability to solve problems. This type of myopic focus on play undermines our call to be recognized as professionals and actually undermines our insistence that children learn through play. After all, if children learn through play, won't the results of assessment demonstrate that learning? Shouldn't the resulting information inform our teaching and refine our ability to meet the needs of the children better? And wouldn't that show in the results?

Why is it that early educators insist we should be exempt from adhering to standards and demonstrating outcomes? This type of resistance casts doubt on the viability of our work. We need to advocate for the right kind of assessment and the right amount of assessment by being a part of the planning processes. We need to count on AFT and other ECE organizations to be at the table when decisions are made, and advocate within the scope of reality while maintaining our focus on our commitment to constructivist constructs.

The Common Core State Standards are not a curriculum

April 10, 2015

Dorothy Strickland, NIEER Distinguished Research Fellow, [responds](#) to specific issues raised in various venues by questioners, considering whether literacy standards and related assessments can be developmentally appropriate.

Concern: Kindergarten standards are not appropriate for children that age. Assessment related to reaching standards will not be developmentally appropriate, and results may be misused.

Much of the concern about CCSS relates to two areas—curriculum and assessment—and not to the standards themselves. Please note: The Common Core State Standards are **NOT** a curriculum. The curriculum must be developed by those responsible for instruction. This might include collaborative efforts by State Departments of Education and school district personnel.

Curriculum

Regarding issues related to the absence of play: Developmental appropriateness has long been a part of our early childhood agenda. Fortunately, there is NOTHING in the CCSS to encourage concerns that there is no room for developmentally appropriate practice. Playful and experiential learning have always been essential elements of an early childhood curriculum and instruction and remain so.

Key Design Considerations are included in the introduction (p.4) of the CCSS: *An integrated model of literacy is recommended. That is, the language arts (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) will be integrated with each other and with content of interest and importance to young children. Research and media skills will be blended into the Standards as a whole.*



Educators familiar with EC know that the integration of *process* (ELA) and *content* (how plants grow, the weather, etc.) is fundamental to theme-based or project-based curriculum and instruction. This has been a basic tenet of early childhood literacy and it remains alive and well. Children explore/research questions related to topics of importance and interest to them. Books, objects, hands-on activities, and media of various types are used to explore topics/themes with children. Teachers engage children as they read aloud to them and discuss what is read. Children are also involved in shared /interactive reading. They are encouraged to follow-up independently as they explore the topics on their own through reading/pretend reading and drawing/writing about topics under investigation.

None of this is new to the field. However, the CCSS promote attention to specific goals, such as: *With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.* At the kindergarten level, the text is likely read/shared with the children by the teacher. This Standard encourages listening, responding, sharing ideas. Equally important, children are learning about a topic of interest to them. This

will include new information and concepts and often includes new vocabulary or “known” vocabulary used in a new way.

A focus on *thinking* with text, and problem solving is encouraged. Again, this is meant to be done in a developmentally appropriate way with an emphasis on gradually increasing expectations throughout the grades. The CCSS are intended to promote skills/strategies that go beyond memorization and foster the *application* of what is learned in new situations.

The use of technology to support curriculum and instruction is encouraged. Indeed, texts may be traditional print or digital. And, we must not forget oral texts—these relate to listening.

Assessment

Much of the concern expressed about CCSS relates to assessment. Excessive assessment is, indeed, an issue in some states. However, like curriculum, it is *not* a function of the CCSS. An increased reliance on Summative Assessments, in particular, has caused concern among many educators. Purposes and uses include to:

- inform educators, students, parents, and the public about the status of student achievement
- hold schools accountable for meeting achievement goals
- inform relevant education policies re: areas in need of attention and resource allocation
- adjust/differentiate instruction according to student needs
- gauge performance of teachers and principals.

While these purposes/uses have always existed, they have taken on new emphasis in recent years (especially their use as tools in educator evaluation) and are often linked to the CCSS. For those whose states have adopted the PARCC assessment and others, I encourage a look at the Model Content Frameworks developed to bridge the Standards with the PARCC Assessments. They can be found online at www.parcconline.

Professional Development should make extensive use of the Model Content Frameworks that accompany the PARCC assessment. The Model Content Frameworks are:

- a voluntary resource not a curriculum
- designed to help teachers better understand the standards and how key elements of the assessment design interact with the standards within a grade and across grade levels.

2 Responses to *The Common Core State Standards are not a curriculum*

Dr. Dawn Rouse says:

[April 10, 2015 at 11:25 am America/New_York-5 \(Edit\)](#)

While I appreciate your perspective, and agree that Common Core is not a curriculum, I think what you are missing is the implementation of the CC in *real* districts. What I am seeing is the polar opposite of what you describe – with mandates coming out that children must be reading when they enter K or they are assessed as “lacking”. I recently observed a math lesson (taken out of the district curriculum manual) that was easily two grades beyond the confused Kindergarten children being asked to manipulate groups of ten in their heads with no manipulatives. It is well and good to say “But that isn’t what was meant!”, but what I am seeing as a University Professor observing students in the local schools is a highly developmentally inappropriate curriculum being implemented with fear and loathing by stressed teachers and confused students.



Patricia Kjolhede says:

[April 18, 2015 at 12:24 pm America/New_York-5 \(Edit\)](#)

As a former classroom teacher, I must agree with Dr. Rouse. I must further point out that the students end up blaming themselves for the confusion in most cases. They somehow hold themselves responsible for not being developmentally capable of handling the assessment that we (the teacher) know full well is not appropriate for them. It makes no sense to me.

Why CCSS-M Grades K-3 is developmentally appropriate and internationally competitive

April 13, 2015

In this [post](#), **Jere Confrey**, Joseph D. Moore Distinguished University Professor, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Department, College of Education, North Carolina State University, discusses **why the Common Core State Standards for Math can be considered developmentally appropriate**. A more detailed version of this analysis, including this chart and others, is available [here](#).

1. The CCSS-M development process drew on teachers and experts in early childhood math education.

According to Jason Zimba, a lead CCSS-M author, feedback was obtained from state directors, elementary teachers, and national experts (Fact Sheet, Student Achievement Partners. The NCR's 2009 report, *Mathematics Learning in Early Childhood: Paths Toward Excellence and Equity* was used. The **National Association for the Education of Young Children** in conjunction with the **National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in States** issued a [joint statement publicly expressing their support for the Standards](#).

2. Standards are not meant to be read to children.

They represent professional knowledge in the field for teachers—just as in the case of medical knowledge, the Standards are not expected to be communicated verbatim to patients by doctors.

3. Standards typically state a clear target in the first sentence that describes the expectation, followed by research-based strategies for student success.

After that, the Standards include *suggestions* for research-backed strategies for learning, to ensure that the students' learning is made as conceptually rich and efficient as possible. Math is a language of connections. Here is first grade example: "Add and subtract within 20, demonstrating fluency for addition and subtraction within 10. . . .



Photo credit: Casey R. Brown

Use strategies such as counting on; making ten (e.g., $8+6 = 8+2+4 = 10+4 = 14$); decomposing a number leading to a ten (e.g., $13-4 = 13-3-1 = 9$)...and creating equivalent but easier or known sums (e.g., adding $6+7$ by creating the known equivalent $6+6+1 = 12+1 = 13$)."

These strategies, from the NRC's *Adding It Up*, are a toolbox for a teacher to build on children's ideas to reach towards the development eventually applying standard algorithms.

4. The Standards are consistent with international standards.

In [Informing Grades 1-6 Mathematics Standards Development](#), AIR took the standards from Singapore, Korea, and Hong Kong, and created a composite set. The major topics in the numbers strand for all three countries follow a similar pattern, across grades, dictated by the logic of mathematics learning. In the chart below on understanding and reading whole numbers, CCSS-M is compared to this composite chart. If we claim our standards are not developmentally appropriate, then how is it that other countries achieve these outcomes? Note, these countries do not offer Kindergarten.

Table 1. Composite Standards for Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea, with the Addition of the CCSS-M. Composite Standards: Numbers—Whole Numbers (AIR, p. 8)

K	Gr. 1	Gr. 2	Gr. 3	Gr. 4	Gr. 5
HK, S, SK	HK, S, SK	HK, S, SK	HK, S, SK	HK, S, SK	HK, S, SK
	<p>Whole numbers to 100:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Count to tell the number of objects in a given set Count forward and backward Compare the number of objects in two or more sets Use ordinal numbers (first, second, up to tenth) and symbols (1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc.) Use number notation and place values (tens, ones) Read and write numbers in numerals and in words <p>Compare and order numbers</p>	<p>Whole numbers to 1,000:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Count in tens and hundreds Use number notation and place values (hundreds, tens, ones) Read and write numbers in numerals and in words Compare and order numbers 	<p>Whole numbers to 10,000:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use number notation and place values (thousands, hundreds, tens, ones) Read and write numbers in numerals and in words Compare and order numbers Understand odd and even numbers 	<p>Whole numbers to 100,000:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use number notation and place values (ten thousands, thousands, hundreds, tens, ones) Read and write numbers in numerals and in words Compare and order numbers Round numbers to the nearest 10 or 100 	<p>Develop an understanding of large numbers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the concept of approximation Estimate the number of a large quantity of objects Round large numbers in thousands, ten thousands, hundred thousands, millions, ten millions, hundred millions
CCSS-M	CCSS-M	CCSS-M	CCSS-M	CCSS-M	CCSS-M
<p>Whole numbers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Count to 100 by ones and tens Count forward from a given number Write numbers 0-20 Represent number of objects with numerals 0-20 Count to answer “how many?” of a group of objects Connect counting to cardinality Compare the numbers of objects in two groups of objects, up to 10 Compare written numerals between 1 and 10 	<p>Whole numbers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Count to 120 Read and write numerals 0-120 Represent a number of objects with numeral 	<p>Whole numbers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Count within 1000 Skip-count by 5s, 10s, and 100s Read and write numbers to 1000 using base-ten numerals, number-names, and expanded form 			

Research Support

[Appendix A: Common Core Standards for ELA/Literacy: Supporting Research and Glossary](#). Similar materials may be found in other appendices.

2 Responses to *Why CCSS-M Grades K-3 is developmentally appropriate and internationally competitive*

1. **[mguddemi](#)** says:

[April 13, 2015 at 11:52 am America/New_York-5](#)

Early childhood experts are most concerned about the Kindergarten CCSS and interestingly Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea have no standards in Kindergarten. In fact, those countries standards in first grade are we expect of our Kindergarteners. This is the problem! Americans want “sooner and faster” and this violates the principles of child development. All Kindergarten children cannot be held accountable for concepts that may be beyond their developmental reach.

2. **[Dr. Dawn Rouse](#)** says:

[April 13, 2015 at 12:27 pm America/New_York-5](#)

My first thoughts—What is Dr. Confrey’s background in actually teaching young children, not simply knowing content? There is a vast difference in understanding developmental timelines for math/science and then implementing those with real human children. In fact, that is one of the weaknesses of CCSS – Teachers of the K-3rd grade were effectively left out of the conversation.

The statement that CCSS asked for input from ECE folks is laughable and easily proved to be negligible at best.

In fact, NAEYC did **not** fully endorse common core and release a document detailing some concerns with the standards.

https://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/11_CommonCore1_2A_rv2.pdf

Is NIEER getting some sort of funding from CCSS for these articles?

- **NIEER says:**
[April 13, 2015 at 1:17 pm America/New_York-5](#)

Tune in Wednesday when we'll hear more on this from Doug Clements, a preschool and kindergarten teacher who was involved in the Common Core workgroups.

What is Developmentally Appropriate Math?

April 15, 2015

Douglas H. Clements, preschool and kindergarten teacher, Kennedy Endowed Chair in Early Childhood Learning, Executive Director, Marsico Institute for Early Learning and Literacy, and one of the members of the Common Core work groups, [responds](#) (with assistance from Bill McCallum) on the issue of **Math standards will be too challenging for young children.**

Perhaps the most common criticism of the Common Core State Standards-Mathematics (CCSS-M) for young children is that they are not “developmentally appropriate” (e.g., Meisels, 2011). Unfortunately, the phrase “developmentally appropriate” too often functions as a Rorschach test for whatever a person wants to see or argue against.



Photo Credit: Casey R. Brown

Often, negative evaluations are based on an implicit acceptance of the view that all “fives” can and especially cannot do certain things. However, much of the mathematical thinking that some people say “cannot be done” until age 7 (or whatever) can be learned by children—most children—in high-quality environments. Further, given children learn such thinking with understanding and joy—*that’s* developmentally appropriate.

Let’s consider some concrete examples. One concern is that 5-6-year-olds are not “ready” to learn place value. Perhaps the phrase itself—“place value”—raises the issue. Close inspection, however, reveals little reason for worry. First, note that research has identified at least seven developmental levels of learning place value, from very early concepts of grouping to understand the exponential nature of number systems in multiple bases (Clements & Sarama, 2014; Fuson, Smith, & Lo Cicero, 1997; Fuson, Wearne, et al., 1997; Rogers, 2012). Examination of the CCSS-M shows that kindergarten children only need to “Work with numbers 11–19 to gain *foundations* for place value” (p. 12, emphasis added) and first graders “Understand that the two digits of a two-digit number represent amounts of tens and ones” such as knowing that “The numbers 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90 refer to one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, or nine tens (and 0 ones).” Those are challenging but (for vast majority of children) *achievable* understandings (did you notice how many times the CCSS-M’s goals involve “understanding”)?

Personally, I have many concrete experiences with *preschoolers* who, given high-quality learning experiences, successfully tackle these ideas and more (Clements & Sarama, 2007, 2008). And love doing it. In Boston, a mother said she wasn’t sure her preschooler could understand mathematical ideas until he told her, “Eleven. That’s just 10 and one, isn’t it?”

Talking about the “levels” of place value brings up a two important points. First, when educators use such levels—organized in a *learning trajectory*—to engage all children in meaningful mathematics at the right level for each—developmental appropriateness is ensured. Second, the Common Core was developed by first writing learning

trajectories—at least the developmental progressions of levels of thinking. (Criticisms that the CCSS-M were “top-down,” starting with high school, e.g., Meisels, 2011, are simply incorrect.) Thus, learning trajectories are at the core of the Common Core.

Let’s take another example: arithmetic problems. Missing addend problems are a first grade standard. Some argue that tasks such as “fill in the blank: $3 + _ = 5$ ” are cognitively out of range for children until, say, 2nd or 3rd grade. It is true that some students may stumble if, unprepared, they are given such tasks in that form. However, most 4- to 5-year-olds in high-quality environments, when asked, “Give me 5 cubes. OK, now watch, I’m going to hide some! [Hides 2 in one hand, then shows the 3 in the other hand.] How many am I hiding?” will eagerly answer, “Two!” Format and interaction matter. So does working through research-based learning in counting and especially conceptual subitizing—quickly recognizing parts and wholes of small numbers (Clements, 1999).

The CCSS-M can help teachers with such work. Historically, most word problem types in U.S. textbooks have been simple one-step problem types. Other countries’ children are solving many types, including more complex two-step problems (Stigler, Fuson, Ham, & Kim, 1986). Further, *given the opportunity*, young U.S. children can solve a wide range of problems, even beyond the CCSS-M, such multiplication and division problems with remainders (Carpenter, Ansell, Franke, Fennema, & Weisbeck, 1993).

One might still argue that the CCSS-M goals are inappropriate for one or another group of children. But this will be true of any set of standards that pose a worthwhile challenge to children of that age. And our children deserve that challenge. Based on learning trajectories, teachers should always be working on the challenging-but-achievable levels for their class and for the individuals in it. But that does not mean we allow children starting at lower levels to stay behind others. That would relegate them to a trajectory of failure (see Vincent Costanza’s [blog](#)). Instead, we should work together to help them build up their mathematical foundations. And given this support, they do.



Photo credit: Casey R. Brown

So, the concern of “developmental inappropriateness” is a misunderstanding. There are others.

1. “The Common Core means that other domains, such as social-emotional development, will be de-emphasized.” The good news there is that high-quality implementations of mathematics curricula in preschools have shown not only increase in meaningful mathematics proficiencies, but also transfer to other domains, such as language and self-regulation (Clements, Sarama, Wolfe, & Spitler, 2013; Julie Sarama, Clements, Wolfe, & Spitler, 2012; Julie Sarama, Lange, Clements, & Wolfe, 2012). Further, preschool curricula can successfully combine social-emotional, literacy, language, science and mathematics (e.g., Julie Sarama, Brenneman, Clements, Duke, & Hemmeter, in press)—all the while enhancing, rather than competing with, play-based approaches (Farran, Aydogan, Kang, & Lipsey, 2005). Finally, those who say that “there should be time for both learning literacy, math, and science, and for play and games”—inadvertently show their limited knowledge of early math education—that learning in subject-matter domains and play and games are separate, non-overlapping enterprises. In contrast, two of the many ways to guide learning in these subject-matter domains are through games and play.

2. "The Common Core is a federal curriculum." Wrong on both counts. First, it was created by the states—the National Governors Association and Council of Chief State School Officers—not the U.S. government. Second, the Common Core is a set of *standards*, not a curriculum (see Dorothy Strickland's [blog](#)). It guides *what goals* to aim for but *not how* or *what curriculum* to teach.
3. "Teachers voices were not heard." Teachers were involved all the way. Many states, such as Arizona, convened meetings of teachers to review the standards at each of three cycles of review. Also, the CCSS-M were supported and validated by such organizations as the NEA, AFT, and NCTM, as well as early childhood organizations such as the NAEYC (see Jere Confrey's [post](#) and this joint [statement](#) publicly expressing NAEYC's and the NAECSS's support for the Standards, and Clements, Sarama, & DiBiase, 2004, in which leaders of NAEYC contributed to a work that was used heavily in the CCSS-M).
4. "The Common Core emphasizes rote skills taught by direct instruction." First, the CCSS-M does not tell how to teach. But its descriptions of goals for children could not be further from this misconception. Consider the introduction to grade 2, which states (in concert with NCTM's Curriculum Focal Points) that children "develop, discuss, and use efficient, accurate, and generalizable methods to compute sums and differences of whole numbers." Second-graders *develop* and *discuss* strategies, then *use* them in problem solving.
5. "There were no early childhood teachers or professionals involved." As one of the contributors to the CCSS-M, I—a former preschool and kindergarten teacher who continuously works in preschools and primary-grade classrooms, with children and teachers—I can only hope these authors simply were sloppy in checking their facts.

Do we think everything is perfect? Of course not. Not even the content of the CCSS-M is (or ever will be) perfect. But only further implementation and study will give us an improved set of standards.

Further, we wish that organizations would implement carefully and slowly, building up (from *pre-K*) and supporting all teachers and other educators in learning about, working on, and evaluating the CCSS-M. Schools that have done that report success, with teachers amazed by what their students can do (Kelleher, 2014). Appreciating what their children are learning means they not only stick with it, but they also improve every year (Clements, Sarama, Wolfe, & Spitler, 2014). We wish curriculum, and especially high-stakes assessments, would be carefully piloted with extensive research on outcomes, including unanticipated outcomes, before they are accepted and more widely disseminated (Julie Sarama & Clements, 2015) (or rejected and not used). We wish more educators would realize *what's truly developmentally inappropriate is present-day kindergarten curricula that "teach" children what they already know* (Engel, Claessens, & Finch, 2013).

But we do think that too many find it easier to dramatically warn of all that could go wrong working with the Common Core ("Students will be pressured!" "There are not CC curricula yet!" "The kids will fail!"). Too few take the more difficult road of building positive solutions. Let's stop biting the finger, and look where it's pointing.

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We are all teachers and learners

April 17, 2015

This [response](#) on literacy standards, conversation, and the Common Core State Standards is from **Sharon Ritchie, Ed.D.**, Senior Scientist, FPG Child Development Institute-UNC CH.

I am a strong supporter of the Common Core. From the outset let me qualify that by saying that it is by no means perfect, and that people have perfectly good reasons to question the Standards and to look for revision and improvement. There is no single thing that should not bear up under scrutiny and inquiry.



Photo credit: Casey R. Brown

The following quote from the Common Core: “Children are deep thinkers and it is the role of the teacher to capably guide and support them,” succinctly summarizes why I support and advocate for the Common Core Standards. The quote demonstrates real respect for both children and teachers, something that has been sadly lacking in

an environment that has, for more than a decade, focused on isolated skill building, right answers, and prescribed curriculum. That environment has been even more strongly enforced for children of color and those who come from less advantaged homes, and put vulnerable children at an even greater disadvantage by depriving them of the use of their voice and their minds. Children need to know that what they care about, what they have to say, and how they feel is important. They need to move beyond basic knowledge to the application of their knowledge to problem solving, analysis, and creative development. They need to have multiple opportunities starting at a very young age to not only talk, but to listen, to participate in a community where everyone's ideas are important and valued.

Two decades of data examining the minute-by-minute experiences of children indicate that on average there is about 28 minutes of meaningful conversation per day between the teacher and all the children in the classroom. There is about 24 minutes of meaningful collaboration between students. That is not enough. If children are getting less than an hour to express themselves, then teachers are using up more than their share of the space. If we are not hearing from children, how do we know what they understand, what confuses them, what they think? Part of children's success depends upon their ability to engage in collaborative work. Regular opportunities to collaborate help children develop executive functions that support their ability to solve problems in multiple ways and to work with others to plan and organize. Children who are simply sitting and getting are not having adequate opportunities to develop executive functions.

In its best form, the Common Core advocates for classroom environments where children feel safe to take risks and experiment with their thinking and have opportunities to communicate their ideas frequently and regularly. Specifically, the English Language Arts Standard requires that students have ample opportunities to take part in a variety of rich, structured conversations—as part of a whole class, in small groups, and with a partner and the Standard for Math across K-3rd grade similarly stipulates that children should be able to make

sense of problems and persevere in solving them and construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others.

A talented kindergarten teacher describes her practice of *letting her students know right from the beginning of the year that:*

- *There are lots of different points of view and they are all important*
- *Right answers are not as important to her as the students being able to figure out how to solve a problem*
- *Everyone makes mistakes—they are natural and we can learn from them*
- *Doing your best is the most important thing*
- *We are all teachers and learners.*

The Common Core supports that teacher. Don't you wish all children had teachers like that? I do.

Common Core and DAP: Seeking clarity

April 20, 2015

Kyle Snow, Ph.D., Director, Center for Applied Research, National Association for the Education of Young Children, [discusses](#) **Common Core State Standards and Developmentally Appropriate Practice.**

The numerous, and diverse, entries in this series related to the Common Core State Standards is testimony to the complexity they present to early childhood education. The Common Core directly applies to young children (and teachers) in kindergarten and later, with implications for children (and their teachers) prior to kindergarten as well. In fall 2012, the National Association for the Education of Young Children released a **brief** outlining what were considered opportunities and concerns for early childhood education within the Common Core. Since then, we have heard far more about the concerns than the opportunities presented by the Common Core.

The most typical of these is that the Common Core is not developmentally appropriate for young children, or some variation of this. Such a statement is indeed alarming, and may or may not turn out to be true. What is intriguing about it, however, is that it lacks specificity—what exactly is the concern being stated? If we can articulate the concern (or concerns) precisely, we can better formulate approaches to address it (or them).

Having talked about the Common Core with teachers, researchers, and policy makers, there seem to be three central issues buried within the “Common Core is not developmentally appropriate” concern:
Is the content of the Common Core appropriate for young children?

1. Will the Common Core affect teaching?
2. Will the Common Core lead to inappropriate use of assessment?



Photo credit: Casey R. Brown

Variations of these have been raised in this blog series. These are also discussed in a forthcoming brief from NAEYC.

As this dialogue unfolds, it is important to consider how much the concerns noted above are the result of the Common Core, and how much they are driven by other or additional forces. In other words, where is the pressure coming from? It is critical to understand the origins of what have been ongoing trends in early childhood education to formulate effective responses to them.

It is also critical to distinguish between what may be considered real threats and what are perceived threats to early childhood education ideals. A critical starting point in doing so is to ensure that we are well versed in the complexities of implementing **developmentally appropriate practice** (DAP) as well as the details of what the Common Core standards say (and do not say).

As has been noted in previous blogs, the Common Core standards describe the learning goals and expectations at each grade (the “what”) not the processes of supporting children to reach towards these goals (the “how”). It is important to explore the reasonableness of all children reaching these goals (that is, validate the “what”), as well as ensuring that we not narrow our educational focus. At the same time, we must ensure that early educators are prepared and supported to bring DAP into their classrooms (that is, nurture the “how”).

The Common Core State Standards in early childhood education: Summary

April 23, 2015

We hope you have enjoyed our blog forum on Common Core State Standards. There are a *lot* of people paying attention to this issue. On day one, we outlined some concerns:

- Rigorous standards may lead to reduced play and less rich activity in preschool and Kindergarten classrooms.
- Literacy instruction may become limited to a few texts and drill-and-kill teaching.
- The standards are complex and extensive, and there is little guidance for teachers to implement them in Kindergarten classrooms.
- Parents don't understand the CCSS and are concerned about what they mean for their children.
- The Kindergarten standards for literacy are not appropriate for children that age.
- Assessment related to reaching standards will not be developmentally appropriate, and results may be misused.
- Alignment with K-12 standards will mean teaching methods, subjects, and assessments that are not developmentally appropriate will be pushed down to preschool levels.
- Math standards will be too challenging for young children.

Our experts addressed many of these. (You can click on links above in this paper, or on March and April in the sidebar of the blog posts page, to see all posts in this forum.) They noted that the standards are not a curriculum; they are standards outlining what children should be expected to know. Expectations are high, but developmentally appropriate. The standards were developed with input from early childhood experts (some of whom responded in this forum) and by early childhood teachers, among others. Some experts explained exactly how the standards are developmentally appropriate.

Commenters expressed the most concern around curriculum and assessment. Some of our experts noted that the CCSS are not a curriculum, but that there is plenty of room to help children meet the standards within a developmentally appropriate curriculum—one including play and plenty of high quality student-teacher conversational opportunities.



Commenters noted that in an ideal world, that *is* what would happen, but that teachers pressed to show improvements in child outcomes may feel they can only resort to training children for the test. Appropriate assessment in early education classrooms should mean that play and learning provide adequate ‘training’ though. Teachers and observers noted that in many real classrooms, expectations, teaching methods, and assessments are pushed down from higher grades.

For parents who are concerned about the CCSS, our experts pointed out that there have always been standards for learning—and wondered

which of the existing standards we would not want our own children to reach?

Across all levels of concern, it seems that attention to clarity would help. Clarity for teachers about what is expected, what is developmentally appropriate—and specifically how they might implement a high quality curriculum (and use appropriate assessment to measure progress)—may help them help children meet the standards.

For administrators, clarity on what a high quality early childhood classroom looks like; appropriate ways to measure quality and success; and guidance in supporting early childhood teachers where they need it most, may help increase understanding about the CCSS and improve classroom practices.

For parents, clarity about specific expectations for their children, about what is going on in the classroom, and about how their child will be evaluated, may help to ease fears of a one-size-fits-all program, and show them how their own child's needs can be met.

Common Core State Standards may be a useful tool to set expectations for all children, and help to assure that they meet them, but more work is needed to ensure that implementation at all levels meets expectations as well.

We hope this series has helped to clarify some of the issues for you. We'll be gathering the posts into one pdf document soon, and we are planning to hold a webinar or two as well. Watch this space for more information, and to provide feedback on the CCSS topics of most interest to you (or please comment below).

–Kirsty Clarke Brown, Editor

One Response to *The Common Core State Standards in early childhood education: Summary*

1. **Donald Yarosz says:** [April 28, 2015 at 1:31 pm America/New_York-5](#)

A Taxonomy of Educational Objectives for Young Children: The Affective, Psychomotor, and Cognitive Domains?

As noted in the introduction to the NIEER BLOG, “A recurring concern is that the Common Core State Standards were developed from the top-down... .” and, “A related issue: Some feel there was insufficient involvement of early childhood research experts in language, literacy, mathematics, and child development in the standards development process.”

I might add that from the perspective of those familiar with the writing of goals and objectives in education, it appears, not surprisingly, that these standards are based of Bloom’s Taxonomy, the Cognitive Domain. As we explore the Common Core Standards as they relate to early learning, perhaps it is time to contemplate ways that both the affective and psychomotor domains might be better balanced with the cognitive domain in the writing of educational goals and objectives for young children. While many are familiar with Taxonomy of Educational Objectives: The Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook 1: Cognitive Domain (Bloom, et.al., 1956), there was also a second Handbook—Handbook II: Affective Domain (Krathwohl, et. al., 1964), and a third volume planned, but never written. However, A Taxonomy of the Psychomotor Domain (Harrow, 1972) was published, in addition to one by R.H. Dave (1970), as well as one by E.J. Simpson (1972) (see references).

While these documents, at this point, may appear to be antiquated texts,(1) it has been noted that “Bloom’s Taxonomy” is one of the most cited but least read texts in all of education. It was originally intended that educators consider all domains, not just one.

Perhaps, at least for young children, we ought to consider more balance among all three domains of learning rather than placing so much emphasis on the cognitive. It appears that the standards, as written for Kindergarten, for example, place most

emphasis on the cognitive domain, with little emphasis on the affective and psychomotor domains (with a few exceptions). So, here are some questions:

What would a new “Taxonomy of Educational Objectives for Young Children: The Affective, Psychomotor, and Cognitive Domains” look like? Would it be helpful to those writing educational objectives? What would be the implications of such a taxonomy for the way common core are written or revised at some point in the future? What would be the implications of rewritten standards for teachers of young children if they were based on a new and revised taxonomy? How might the affective and psychomotor domains best integrated with the cognitive?

The good news is that reading through the New Jersey State Department of Education, Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards, it appears many developmental domains are well represented. These standards can provide inspiration for those working on Kindergarten Standards (as well as preschool standards) in all states. Those working on standards in their own states ought to take a close look at these.

It appears that New Jersey leads the way in terms its comprehensive approach to the development of standards for children and what they offer teachers, as well. Hats off to those who worked so hard to develop these!

Don Yarosz

1 Bloom’s Taxonomy was updated in 2001. See Anderson, L.W., Krathwohl, D.R., Airasian, P.W., Cruikshank, K.A., Mayer, R.E., Pintrich, P.R., Raths, J., Wittrock, M.C. (2001). *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: A revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. New York: Pearson, Allyn & Bacon.

References

Bloom, B.S. (Ed.), Engelhart, M.D., Furst, E.J., Hill, W.H., & Krathwohl, D.R. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals. Handbook 1: Cognitive domain*. New York: David McKay

Dave, R.H. (1970). Psychomotor levels. In R.J. Armstrong (Ed.) *Developing and writing educational objectives* (pp. 33-34). Tucson AZ: Educational Innovators Press.

Harrow, A.J. (1972). *A taxonomy of the psychomotor domain*. New York: David McKay Co.

Krathwohl, D.R., Bloom, B.S., and Masia, B.B. (1964). Taxonomy of educational objectives: Handbook II: Affective domain. New York: David McKay Co.

Simpson, E.J. (1972) The Classification of Educational Objectives in the Psychomotor Domain Washington DC: Gryphon House

Selected Related Resources

A National Association for the Education of Young Children [brief](#) outlining the opportunities and concerns for early childhood education within the Common Core.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children in conjunction with the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in States issued a [joint statement](#) publicly expressing their support for the Standards.

A composite set of standards from Singapore, Korea and Hong Kong, in [Informing Grades 1-6 Mathematics Standards Development](#), from AIR.

[Appendix A: Common Core Standards for ELA/Literacy: Supporting Research and Glossary.](#)

Resources for Parents:

Council of the Great City Schools guide to supporting your child:
<http://www.cgcs.org/domain/36>

CCSS Initiative What parents should know:
<http://www.corestandards.org/what-parents-should-know/>

National PTA Parent Guide to Student Success:
<http://www.pta.org/parents/content.cfm?ItemNumber=2583>

NAEYC Guide to CCSS Initiative
<http://www.naeyc.org/topics/common-core>