

June 2018

Dear Juniors,

Welcome to Honors American Literature and Advanced Placement English Language through American Literature. For the 2018-19 school year, the following policy applies:

If due to low enrollment course 1070 [Advanced Placement English Language through American Literature] is not offered, any interested student may take course 1030 [Honors American Literature] and independently prepare for the AP English Language exam. If a student passes the AP exam with a score 3 or above, as reported by the College Board in July, his or her transcript will be changed to indicate that the student completed English 11 at the AP level; weighted GPA will also be altered to reflect this achievement.

What follows is a summer assignment for you to complete over the summer. It is appropriate for *both* courses.

1. Sign out a copy of *Conversations in American Literature*.
2. Send an email to **pculliton@mascenic.org** introducing yourself, telling me a little about yourself and your concerns about the U.S. today. Do this **by July 10**
3. Check your school e-mail several times a week.
4. Read *Conversations in American Literature* Chapters 1-4.
5. Read the attached articles “Treating Common-Core Syndrome” by Linda Diamond and “The unspoken atrocity of standardized education” by Molly Rowan Leach
6. Follow the instructions at the tops of the articles and **annotate** them. An example of how to do this is on pp. 54-55 of the textbook. **SAVE** your annotated articles and bring them with you the **first day of class in August**. Don’t forget to analyze the pictures/graphics (visual texts) in each!
7. Find one **other** well-written opinion piece on the topic of the Common Core and/or standardized testing, from a reliable on-line source, published **after 2014**. Send me the title, author and URL via school email **by August 1, 2018**. The piece can be for or against the Common Core and/or standardized testing.
8. Keep checking your school email!

Directions: Annotate the following commentary. Using the extra-wide margins, note rhetorical devices used, such as appeals to emotion, ethics or logic; sentence structure; point-of-view; purpose; word choice; references and allusions; and any other means the author uses to communicate with the reader and make her point.

Treating Common-Core Syndrome

By Linda Diamond

Commentary

Education Week Vol. 33, Issue 02, Pages 26-27, 29. 28 Aug 2013

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/08/28/02diamond.h33.html?tkn=LYSF%2BM98t7TdkFfBCYGEXiWfJzSJUHWDuQCz&print=1>

A NEW disorder seems to have swept the nation: Common Core State Standards Syndrome. This malady is characterized by sharply polarized positions—worshipping the common core as schools’ salvation, or condemning it as on the path to Armageddon.

The clinical manifestation is similar: op-eds in newspapers (“Common Core Education Is Uncommonly Inadequate,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 28, 2013) or editorials (“Moving Ahead With Common Core,” *The New York Times*, April 20, 2013), impassioned blogs, and spirited tweets.

Entire states exhibit symptoms as well, embracing the standards one year and threatening to dump them the next.

Nonetheless, the attention being trained on the standards has the potential to transform our education system if the focus shifts to the more difficult challenge—implementation. Neither side in the debate believes that the standards alone will be sufficient, but the heavy lifting required may be beyond the capacity of many districts and schools.

“Are states really focusing on the crucial details of implementation and allotting enough time and resources to get the job done?”

As a nation, we do not have a history of thoroughly implementing or sustaining education reforms, which is troubling.

State standards are not new. We have always had a de facto set of them, driven by textbook publishers that produced national series used across states. As states developed their own standards, they often built them upon the standards written by others. But even with this history, education quality and student achievement have remained stagnant at best. Why?

Rigorous standards alone will not improve student achievement, and if we focus too much on the common-core standards themselves, we may limit the more urgent discussion about implementation. Are states really focusing on the crucial details of implementation and allotting enough time and resources to get the job done?

What is needed is a consensus on critical implementation requirements. These include specifying the details of the curriculum and how instruction should look so that students master the standards and struggling students receive the supports they need; planning a comprehensive assessment system that starts in kindergarten and is designed to identify or predict reading problems; providing continuous professional learning opportunities for teachers; selecting strong curriculum materials; communicating to all stakeholders; and developing knowledgeable educators.

The standards are not a curriculum. Because this is true, educators are busy “unpacking” them. What does this really mean?

State education departments should guide districts by spelling out specific frameworks. These frameworks should include sequences based on careful task analyses that lead to articulated and robust curriculum. What specific content will be taught, for how long, at what grades, and in what order? This is no easy task. In some districts this has devolved to teachers writing their own lessons without adequate preparation. Is this really time well spent?

Figuring out the right amount of practice for a new skill or concept, the correct order of introduction, when to provide more guided instruction, and when to provide more fluid structure is difficult.

The common-core mathematics standards provide a more overt progression than do the English/language arts, or ELA, standards. While the appendix to the ELA standards provides a progression for phonemic awareness and language skills, no such progression exists for writing. The standards themselves contain a phonics progression, but details on teaching are left up to schools.

Unlike the mathematics standards, the ELA standards are pedagogically neutral, except for their focus on close reading. Textbook publishers, if they do the job right and thoroughly, can bolster the implementation of strong curriculum to support achievement.

New math and ELA texts and resources are essential to implementing the common core successfully. If left to schools and districts alone, articulation and coherence may be elusive.

Amnesia also seems to afflict some educators when it comes to the National Reading Panel findings from April 2000, which recommended that systematic phonics be a routine part of reading instruction for all elementary students. The reading-foundational-skills standards in the common core show that their authors recognized the importance of these skills.



What is not clearly evident, however, is how much time and practice needs to be devoted to mastering these skills.

Despite the evidence, we appear to be drifting away from systematic instruction in these skills. In part, this is the result of the placement of the reading foundational skills after the text-based standards in the common core, thus potentially minimizing their importance.

It also stems from a testing plan that starts in 3rd grade, with fewer states attending to the importance of preventive screening and early diagnosis of reading problems in kindergarten through 3rd grade. Continued vigilance in the primary grades and systematic reading instruction are imperative. Because of the emphasis placed on literary and informational text work, it is important to remember that children must be able to decipher words and read fluently, especially if they are going to meet increasingly rigorous textual demands.

Designing curriculum of sufficient depth to effectively address foundational skills while also meeting the common core's demands regarding text will be challenging. Will the new basal readers or anthologies meet these dual challenges?

Without a strong and continued commitment to effective research-based early-literacy instruction along side rich content, we may be doomed to high rates of failure in the upper grades by students who still don't read well.

As a profession, we seem to avoid discussions of teaching methods. Once we have defined a specific curriculum, how we teach it does make a difference. A strong body of research points to instructional methods that have a high likelihood of raising achievement. In a recent essay for the *Education Week Teacher* online site, Mike Schmoker argued for "soundly structured lessons" based on research dating back nearly 50 years but largely ignored. He said the research recommended:

- Articulating a purpose statement or opening with a provocative question;
- Modeling or demonstrating the carefully calibrated steps in learning a new skill;
- Guided and active practice of each individual small step the teacher modeled while checking for understanding; and
- Repeating the cycle based on student feedback and to support those who need further instruction.

Curriculum and instruction must be the levers by which the common-core standards become reality and firmly take root. State departments of education must play a vital role in ensuring this focus.

Setting rigorous expectations for what students should know and be able to do is an essential step that will bring a degree of consistency to our national education system. However, the common-core standards represent neither salvation nor Armageddon. Rather, it is time to shift national intensity from the standards to their implementation, with a focus on curriculum and instruction. Without this shift, the common core may end up as just one more failed reform.

Linda Diamond is the chief executive officer of the Consortium on Reaching Excellence in Education, in Berkeley, Calif. She is a former public school teacher, principal, director of K-12 instruction and professional development, and senior policy analyst for an education think tank. She is also a co-author of *Teaching Reading Sourcebook*, 2nd Edition (Arena, 2008); *Assessing Reading: Multiple Measures*, 2nd Edition (Academic Therapy Publications, 2008); and *Vocabulary Handbook* (Paul H. Brookes, 2007). She can be reached at ldiamond@corelearn.com.

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The unspoken atrocity of standardized education

Molly Rowan Leach [1] 4 April 2014

Published on *openDemocracy* (<http://www.opendemocracy.net>)

As the corporate takeover of public education proceeds in the US and other countries, schools cease to be training grounds for social transformation. We are not just fighting for our children, but for the liberation of our country.

For my son David, who's at the youngest edge of second grade at school in



From the Denver "Zombie Crawl" against standardized testing. Credit: <http://blogs.westwood.com> [8]. All rights reserved.

Colorado, things are not going well - at least according to the results of the standardized tests [9] that every school in the US has to use. These tests say that he is struggling, but at home he was always an imaginative and enthusiastic learner. Over the past two years however, he's expressed increasing hatred towards school, where he's more and more discouraged by a climate that subjects children to mounting pressures to conform to a narrow and mechanistic vision of education.

This isn't just a problem for David; it's a crisis that's engulfing all children in the USA, because it starves them of the skills and capacities they're going need to transform society in the future. Given that similar forces are at work in the UK and other countries [10], it's time that we all woke up to their calamitous effects and joined the movement to reverse them.

Who is responsible for this situation, and who benefits? Not children, or their parents, or their teachers, or the communities in which they live. Although David's school is packed with caring and competent staff, something is

happening that's beyond their control: a corporate takeover of public education. That's where the story begins, but thankfully, it's not where it ends.

In the United States, it's no secret that corporate interests have already taken over most of the systems that are supposed to educate and care for people, and to keep them healthy. After all, this is the country where a corporation has the same rights as a person [11]. Prisons are filling up while private companies [12] reap billions of dollars from incarceration. "Big Pharma [13]" and the health insurance industry are key beneficiaries of Obamacare [14], which is about as affordable for regular people [15] as a small Mercedes. The federal budget is still dominated by a Military Industrial Complex [16] that sucks resources out of national efforts to enhance people's lives.

So it's no surprise that education is being added to this list, with corporate entities earning mountains of money [17] from a package of reforms that are labeled and sold as 'improvements.'

These reforms come straight out of neo-liberal ideology, where the purpose of education is to prepare children for the labor market. Therefore, priority is given to basic competencies in literacy and mathematics - the so-called "common core standards [18]." Anything that doesn't fit into these basic competencies - like the arts and physical education - must be dropped or drastically scaled down. The standards are measured by tests which are produced and scored by private companies [19], maximizing the use of their own technology.

The results of the tests are then used to evaluate the performance [20] of both teachers and their schools. Those who perform well are rewarded financially, and those that do poorly are fired, or see their schools closed down and handed over to private charters [21]. Competition is everything, a motif that runs through the names of successive government programs like "Race to the Top [22]" and "No Child Left Behind [23]." In the process, the market is capturing public education for itself.

The underlying message is one of standardization to the lowest common denominator. Conform. Sit still for long periods of time. Focus on the basics. Be grateful that you are taught by teachers who are overtired, underpaid and under-respected. Squeeze as much money as possible out of the system for consultants, managers and corporations. Does this sound familiar?

The process begins as early as five years old when children enter kindergarten. There they must enroll in a system of reading comprehension tests known as DIBELS [24], or "Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills." According to author Ken Goodman [25], not only do the tests reduce reading to a few narrow skills, but they only measure a fragment of them anyway. It's a system that rewards speed but not comprehension. Teachers must score children 'on the fly' while administering the tests, using a stopwatch which students find distracting.

Because of these flaws, Goodman [25] concludes that DIBELS “cannot be administered and scored consistently” even though their results can determine whether a student progresses from one grade to another. Worse still, new laws in Colorado and other states link standardized test results to teacher evaluations, tying at least 50 per cent of their job performance rankings to something that can’t even be measured consistently. In plain English, teachers must improve the test scores of their students in order to keep their jobs. Not surprisingly, this leads to widespread cheating and test-score manipulation [26] in order to inflate the image of success.

Paul Horton [17], a teacher at the University of Chicago Lab School, goes further:

“The purpose of the Common Core standards is to generate profits for business and deskill teachers. The Common Core standards are essential to the long-term strategy of leaders in business-industry-and-government to eliminate unions, to replace experienced teachers with Teach for America [an NGO that places college graduates in schools], and to hand public schools over to private management.”

The driving force behind this revolution, Horton concludes, is greed. And the best course of action is to eliminate the Common Core completely.

The problems created by these policies are so bad that even their original architects have changed their minds, sometimes in spectacular fashion. Diane Ravitch, for example, who was the chief strategist behind the “No Child Left Behind” program during the administration of George H.W. Bush, now says she was very, very wrong [27]. Teacher Aaron Pribble [20] calls tests and teacher evaluations “the arbitrary albatross.”

Whether you are for or against standardized testing and the other measures that form part of the corporate wish-list, everyone wants their children to learn, and perhaps even to be inspired in the process. But what does that mean? What does a ‘good education’ consist of, and who decides? Where is the “bow that casts the arrow of our children’s lives” aiming, as Kahlil Gibran asks in “The Prophet [28]?”

In my view, schools should be places where imagination and creativity can flourish [29]. I want all children to be empowered and freed from restrictions, so that they can be independent and accountable for the choices they make. Education should nurture these qualities, and open children up to the full range of possibilities in life, where magic and truth lie around every corner. I want them to be happy, healthy, and whole. I want them to be academically competent, but not at the cost of their empathy, creativity, and free thinking.

When we insist on “teaching to the test [30],” the pressure mounts for everyone involved - parents, children and their teachers. Teachers who already commit so much of their lives to children are pushed to conform, narrow their horizons, and remain silent if they want to keep their jobs. Children pick up on these

pressures. They can feel and taste them in the air of the corridor and the classroom, as thick as the ice in my Colorado Rockies winter.

But teachers and parents are fighting back. United Opt Out National [31] is a movement to end corporate reforms in education. It supports parents who want their children to opt out of the system, building resistance at every level in the process. Parents are encouraged to mobilize in support of students and staff so that they can protect their schools from external pressures.

For example, in Chicago in February, 2014, teachers at the Saucedo Scholastic Academy [32] unanimously voted to opt out of the tests, bolstered by parents who supported their actions. In Seattle, a similar uprising [33] occurred at the Seattle Hill Elementary School, where parents used the rights contained in the No Child Left Behind program to remove their children from mandated testing. And at Garfield High School (also in Seattle), a monumental boycott [34] occurred that has helped to spark resistance nationwide.

Meanwhile, back at David's school in Colorado, parents, children and teachers continue to walk the line between conformity and outrage. Sometimes I'm surprised at how quickly schools have become corrupted, but it's easy to make something look as though it's beneficial when the reality is the opposite - that's part of the power of the corporate reformers. The fact is that good people who provide the 'bone marrow' of the education system are being force-fed requirements that clamp down on everything from children's ability to grow and learn at their own pace, to the security and satisfaction of teachers, who worry whether they will have a job at all next year.

As the days pass, mobilization against the reforms increases, both as a protective measure and as a foundation for building an education system of which we can be proud. When I am fully present with my son, and when I join forces with his teachers and with the parents of his classmates, I can see what needs to be done. It's our collective voice that will keep the school doors open for children to develop their freedom and imagination, their playfulness and sense of joy in art, and their love for themselves and other people.

We are not just fighting for our children, but for the liberation of our country.

Molly Rowan Leach is a specialist in the field of Restorative Justice and is Founder/Executive Producer of the popular webcast, Restorative Justice on The Rise. She is a media partner with the National Association for Communities and Restorative Justice (NACR) and a Certified RJ Facilitator. She lives in Colorado, a leading state in the growing restorative justice movement in the US.

Source URL: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/molly-rowan-leach/unspoken-atrocity-of-standardized-education>

Links:

[1] <http://www.opendemocracy.net/author/molly-rowan-leach>

[2] <http://www.opendemocracy.net/ad-hoc/education>

[3] <http://www.opendemocracy.net/topics/ideas>

- [4] <http://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/transforming-society>
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- [7] [http://twitter.com/share?text=The unspoken atrocities of standardized education](http://twitter.com/share?text=The%20unspoken%20atrocities%20of%20standardized%20education)
- [8] <http://blogs.westwood.com/>
- [9] <http://standardizedtests.procon.org/>
- [10] <http://www.theguardian.com/education/2010/sep/20/school-reforms-usa-uk>
- [11] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporate_personhood
- [12] <http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2011/06/23/251363/cca-geogroup-prison-industry/>
- [13] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Big_Pharma
- [14] <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/09/26/is-obamacare-working>
- [15] <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/21/business/new-health-law-frustrates-many-in-middle-class.html>
- [16] <http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2013/03/10/10-companies-profitting-most-from-war/1970997/>
- [17] <http://dianeravitch.net/2014/02/27/paul-horton-common-core-standards-are-not-about-education-but-about-profits/>
- [18] <http://www.corestandards.org/>
- [19] <http://www.alternet.org/education/corporations-profit-standardized-tests>
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- [21] <http://www.greatschools.org/school-choice/6987-public-private-charter-schools.gs>
- [22] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Race_to_the_Top
- [23] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_Child_Left_Behind
- [24] <http://dibels.org/dibels.html>
- [25] http://www.amazon.com/dp/0325010501/ref=rdr_ext_tmb
- [26] <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/03/education/atlanta-cheating-scandal-reignites-testing-debate.html>
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- [30] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teaching_to_the_test
- [31] <http://unitedoptout.com/>
- [32] <http://www.wbez.org/news/test-protest-chicago-teachers-say-theyll-refuse-give-isat-109772>
- [33] http://seattletimes.com/html/dannywestneat/2017902194_danny04.html
- [34] <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/education-uprising/pencils-down>
- [35] <http://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/molly-rowan-leach/six-boys-one-cop-and-road-to-restorative-justice>
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- [37] <http://www.opendemocracy.net/transformation/michael-edwards/12-year-old-madison-kimrey-rocks-north-carolina-politics>
- [38] <http://www.thepeacealliance.org/issues-advocacy/restorative-justice/#.UgvVTFNa8sg>
- [39] <http://www.restorativejusticeontherise.com/>
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