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## Florida Teacher: "I Was Among Those Who Reviewed the Common Core in 2009"

By [Anthony Cody](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/) (<http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/>) on November 6, 2013 11:43 AM (2013-11-06T11:43:18-05:00)

One of the sticky issues regarding the Common Core remains the secretive way the standards were first written, and the almost total absence of classroom educators from that process -- which **I first pointed out in 2009**. ([http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/2009/07/national\\_standards\\_process\\_ign.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/2009/07/national_standards_process_ign.html)) To this concern we have been repeatedly told that teachers were involved in a review process that followed this initial "confidential" process to write the first draft. The Common Core website features a document entitled "**Myths v. Facts About the Common Core Core Standards**". (<http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CoreFacts.pdf>)"

The document states:

**Myth:** No teachers were involved in writing the Standards.

**Fact:** The common core state standards drafting process relied on teachers and standards experts from across the country. In addition, there were many state experts that came together to create the most thoughtful and transparent process of standard setting. This was only made possible by many states working together. For more information, please visit: [www.corestandards.org](http://www.corestandards.org)

As I reported in 2009 ([http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/2009/07/national\\_standards\\_process\\_ign.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/2009/07/national_standards_process_ign.html)), the two "Working Groups" that actually wrote the first drafts of the standards do NOT include a single classroom teacher. You can **see for yourself here on this list** ([http://www.nga.org/cms/home/news-room/news-releases/page\\_2009/col2-content/main-content-list/title\\_common-core-state-standards-development-work-group-and-feedback-group-announced.html](http://www.nga.org/cms/home/news-room/news-releases/page_2009/col2-content/main-content-list/title_common-core-state-standards-development-work-group-and-feedback-group-announced.html)) provided by the National Governors Association. The two "Feedback Groups" include only one classroom teacher.

But there was a subsequent review process, which obviously occurred after the Common Core drafts were written, and this process did include outreach and input from a larger number of teachers. But was this process enough to say, as the Common Core website asserts, that "The common core state standards drafting process relied on teachers and standards experts from across the country"?

I recently learned of a Florida high school Language Arts teacher named Mike Archer, who was a part of that process. I asked him to describe his experiences, to see if we could shed light on this.

**Question: I would appreciate any insights you have as a result of your participation in the standards review.**

Becoming a second-career teacher humbled yet excited me. I listened and learned from skilled veterans, became nationally certified, grew active in my local union, served on its board, and helped lobby legislators from my district.

In 2009, FEA [Florida Education Association] asked me to join a group of teachers from several states to review the draft "College and Work Readiness Standards" for reading, writing, and communication. My colleague Rene Caldwell and I traveled to Washington for a series of workshops and meetings. I returned in 2011 for the AFT [American Federation of Teachers] Mini-Institute designed to support the CCSS rollout.

In 2009 I was glad to see that many of the language arts skills - demonstrate independence, respond well to author, audience, and purpose, higher-order evaluative thinking, incorporate varied perspectives and cultures - matched my teaching goals. I believe in challenging work, but also in self-discovery, collaboration, addressing multiple intelligences, student-led lessons and demonstration. For me, these methods work best with varied, teacher-designed assessment. I believe teachers can diagnose students far better than bubble tests.

I had assumed that the Common Core language arts writers would have been working closely with NCTE [National Council of Teachers of English], so I called to learn how to best support their contribution at the standards review. It surprised me to learn from NCTE that the standards writers had not been working with them.

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As the review unfolded, it became apparent that we were not working with a holistic, integrated application of standards. To Keme and me, it began to look instead like a checklist forming a platform for standardized testing.

This worried me because, as we have seen again and again, over dependence on testing works against creative, professional teaching methods.

**Question: Was your input respected and incorporated in meaningful ways?**

My input was politely heard. I vaguely recall some wording tweaks from the CCSS folks, but my main issue - that the standards could be a guide to be used creatively and professionally rather than another big "accountability" list - wasn't really part of the review agenda.

AFT staffers were friendly and welcoming. The president sent a warm thank-you letter. I remain loyal to the union. But for me, the review felt overly managed from above. This was the next wave of corporate education reform. I had been naive to think I could somehow make a difference in any larger sense.

So, on my own, I began to dig deeper. Today I urge AFT and NEA leaders to change course, back away from the standards and help expose their harmful characteristics.

**Question: Do you feel the standards reflect what educators know about how children learn?**

There may be some benefit to schools that acquire accompanying technology, as long as these tools support - not replace - creative, innovative teaching. That said, my prediction is no, the standards generally will not contribute to improved instruction, even though heroic teachers will struggle to make things work.

Here are my concerns:

1. CCSS will perpetuate the overuse and misuse of high-stakes testing. This will worsen the current transition of schools into test-prep centers, narrowing the curriculum, robotizing lesson plans, creating unmotivated students, dampening discovery and wisdom. I believe learning should be fun, filled with interaction and collaboration, incentivizing lifelong self-improvement. Linking the standards to punitive testing puts the incentive on prep rather than personal enrichment.
2. In some districts, funds will be diverted away from needs such as labs, career training, arts, humanities, and varied college-prep electives. A well-rounded education will be more difficult to obtain, especially in those schools facing financial difficulties and poor evaluations based on test scores.
3. Inappropriate levels of regimentation may be imposed on our youngest students, special ed students and English language learners.
4. Data management will enable the transfer of personal student information, information that should remain family business, to private commercial interests.

My thoughts concerning education reform:

I believe Naomi Klein's "Shock Doctrine" may apply to CCSS and other aspects of education reform. Education budgets present tempting targets for private interests. These interests manipulate data to further the claim that a crisis exists - or to direct public attention away from the harsh impact of poverty, blaming teachers and schools for socio-economic conditions that impede learning. Then they cultivate relationships with politicians who provide the "solution" - new laws that transfer public education funds into corporate hands for test purchasing, grading, and development.

This scenario dominates education policy in my state. Between 1996 and 2008, FDOE reports we spent \$400 million on testing, with annual spending rising steadily. The showcase test, FCAT, has been crippled by one controversy after another and has been misused to evaluate schools and teachers. More millions will be spent on CCSS assessments and these too will likely be misused as "accountability" measures.

Neither political party seems interested in dropping the unhealthy obsession with high-stakes testing, or in listening to teachers about education policy in general.

Republicans want to privatize education. Democrats want to corporatize it. Either way business wins and students lose. Public education oversight grows more parasitical with each election.

**What do you think? Does this report support the assertion that the Common Core process "relied on teachers...?"**

*Mike Archer of Florida, a former newspaper editor and columnist, retired early to become a teacher in Mount Dora, where for eight years he taught all levels of high school Language Arts. He retired this year, but remains active with his local teachers union.*

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