

# Our conversation with you about “Social Studies at the (Common) Core”...



Andrea S. Libresco

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Anyone familiar with the “pedagogical shifts”<sup>1</sup> required by the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts and Literacy—1) Balancing Informational and Literary Text, 2) Building Knowledge in the Disciplines, 3) Staircase of Complexity, 4) Text-Based Answers, 5) Writing From Sources, 6) Academic Vocabulary—knows that these standards are compatible with social studies instruction.

Yet many of us have felt that the CCSS goal of “college and career readiness” has been a deficient one. A little over a year ago, our colleague Alan Singer wrote a piece on his HuffingtonPost blog, “What’s Missing from Common Core is Education for Democracy,” arguing that “Democracy requires that Americans see themselves as citizens, not just consumers or employees. Common Core, by ignoring the fundamental values that make democracy possible, does education and the United States a tremendous disservice.”<sup>2</sup>

Thankfully, NCSS was already at work to remedy what was lacking in the CCSS. The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards,<sup>3</sup> published in November 2013, added to the curriculum the most critical “C” in a democracy: Citizenship. The C3 Framework underscores the goal of nurturing “knowledgeable, thinking, and active citizens,” indicating that “our democratic republic will not sustain unless students are aware of their changing cultural and physical environments; know the past; read, write, and think deeply; and act in ways that promote the common good.” Thus, the framework asserts, “now more than ever, students need the intellectual power to recognize societal problems; ask good questions and develop robust investigations into them; consider possible solutions and consequences; separate evidence-based claims from parochial opinions; and communicate and act upon what they learn.”<sup>4</sup>

The team of authors who developed the C3 Framework did not seek to supplant the CCSS; rather, they created a document that connects effectively with it: “The C3 Framework emphasizes and elaborates on those skills in the Common Core Standards that explicitly connect to inquiry, and recognizes the

shared responsibility social studies plays in honing key literacy skills.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the Anchor Standards of reading, writing, speaking and listening are both supported and extended by the C3 Framework’s four dimensions:

### ***Dimensions of the C3 Framework’s Inquiry Arc***

1. Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries
2. Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools<sup>6</sup>
3. Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence; and
4. Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action.

The authors in this issue of *SSYL* present lessons that align with both the CCSS and the C3 Framework. Inquiry is at the “core” of their curriculum and instruction.

In their article “Writing a School Constitution: Representative Democracy in Action,” Lorraine S. McGarry and Donnan M. Stoicovy detail a yearlong project during which students wrote a code of rights and responsibilities, which included the authentic experiences of electing representatives and holding a constitutional convention.

“Our North Carolina Digital Stories: Weaving Common Core Standards into a Fourth Grade History Project,” is a piece that walks us through the process that students experienced as they researched and created historically-focused, multimodal digital stories. The article is by Nancy Luke, Russell Binkley, Naomi Marotta, and Melissa Pirkle.

Elizabeth Brown and Linda Silvestri’s article, “Grassroots Activists and the Three Branches of Government: Key Players in the Civil Rights Movement,” recounts fourth grade students’ discovery of the powerful effect that activists had on moving each branch of government toward ending racial segregation. Judges, executive officials, and legislators were finally compelled to action, responding to various forms of protest and persuasion in towns and cities across the nation.

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Volume 27 • Number 1

5

**Writing a School Constitution: Representative Democracy in Action**

*Lorraine S. McGarry and Donnan M. Stoicovy*

8

**Our North Carolina Stories: Weaving Standards into a Fourth Grade Digital History Project**

*Nancy Luke, Russell Binkley, Naomi Marotta, and Melissa Pirkel*

13

**Grassroots Activists and the Three Branches of Government: Key Players in the Civil Rights Movement**

*Elizabeth Brown and Linda Silvestri*

**PULLOUT:**

**How Did Grassroots Activists and the Three Branches of Government End Segregation?**

*Elizabeth Brown and Linda Silvestri*

19

**Investigating a Neighborhood: An Activity Using the C3 Framework**

*Margaret Smith Crocco and Michael P. Marino*

25

**Teaching about Valley Forge: Using Standards for Action and Achievement**

*Jeffrey G. Maxim and George W. Maxim*

30

**Exploring Human Capital with Primary Children: What We Learn in School Does Matter**

*Bonnie T. Meszaros and Mary C. Suiter*



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**ON THE COVER:** National Junior Ranger Day" at Valley Forge National Historic Park. Visit [nps.gov/vafo](http://nps.gov/vafo) and see page 29. Background: A detail of an illustration (ca. 1907) by John W. Dunsmore of George Washington at winter quarters in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. Library of Congress, [www.loc.gov/pictures/item/91792202](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/91792202).

The Pullout by the same authors, “How Did Grassroots Activists and the Three Branches of Government End Segregation?” provides handouts that teachers can use or adapt to their own grade level and student population.

Margaret Smith Crocco and Michael P. Marino’s article, “Investigating a Neighborhood: An Activity Using the C3 Framework,” shares activities that give students opportunities to interrogate maps, photos, texts, and paintings as they investigate a slice of the neighborhood of Greenwich Village, then and now. Teachers can also create similar lessons about their own communities using images that are increasingly available online and in local museums and historical societies.

“Teaching about Valley Forge: Using Standards for Action and Achievement” by Jeffrey G. Maxim and George W. Maxim highlights the importance for fifth graders of creating stories and communicating content as they learn about the American Revolutionary War.

In “Exploring Human Capital with Primary Children: What We Learn in School Does Matter,” Bonnie T. Meszaros and Mary C. Suiter provide young students with strategies, linked to the C3 Framework’s four dimensions, for learning about the value of improving their human capital.

How do the Common Core and the C3 Framework inform and guide YOUR curriculum and instruction? More specifically,

- How are you incorporating the four dimensions of the Inquiry Arc of the C3 Framework?<sup>7</sup>
- How are you helping students develop capacities for each dimension?
- To what extent do you feel that your social studies curriculum provides students with the kind of “first-hand experiences” about which Lucy Sprague Mitchell wrote 80 years ago, wherein students interact with the data before them?<sup>8</sup>
- How important are maps, photographs, newspapers, and other documents to your curriculum and instruction?
- How important is a “wonderwall” (or a similar construct) to stimulate thinking about compelling social studies questions?<sup>9</sup>
- How important is triangulation in strengthening the accuracy of students’ research?<sup>10</sup>
- What strategies for examining primary sources do you find work best with your students? How does your work with primary sources vary, based on grade level?

And, regarding some of the specific strategies in the articles:

- To what extent does your teaching of the Constitution include real life examples and opportunities for application?
- When you explore the civil rights movement with your students, to what extent do you focus on participants both in the government and those working with grassroots organizations?
- Have you and your students ever participated in the creation and ratification of a school-wide or classroom Constitution?
- To what extent have you been able to make school elections and student governance a meaningful experience?
- What aspects of inquiry do you employ when you and your students explore their neighborhoods?
- What materials do your students use to analyze and assess changes in their neighborhoods?
- What successes have you had with students creating digital stories to explicate historical topics?
- What strategies do you use to engage students in understanding and application of economic concepts?

We look forward to the thoughtful conversation around C3 Framework online at NCSS Connections. Please join us!

—Andrea and Jeannette

#### Notes

1. “Pedagogical Shifts Demanded by the Common Core State Standards: Shifts in ELA/Literacy,” (EngageNY.org/NYSED, no date), [www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/common-core-shifts.pdf](http://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/common-core-shifts.pdf).
2. “New York State P-12 Common Core Learning Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy,” (EngageNY.org/NYSED, January 10, 2011), [www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/nysp12cclsela.pdf](http://www.engageny.org/sites/default/files/resource/attachments/nysp12cclsela.pdf).
3. Alan Singer, “What’s Missing from the Common Core is Education for Democracy,” *The Huffington Post* (July 30, 2013), [www.huffingtonpost.com/alan-singer/whats-missing-from-common\\_b\\_3673244.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alan-singer/whats-missing-from-common_b_3673244.html).
4. NCSS, *Social Studies for the Next Generation: Purposes, Practices, and Implications of the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards* (Bulletin 113, Silver Spring, MD: NCSS, 2013).  
\* Free PDF of the C3 Framework at [www.socialstudies.org/c3](http://www.socialstudies.org/c3).  
\* Buy the paperback book (with introductory essays) at [www.socialstudies.org/store](http://www.socialstudies.org/store).
5. C3 Framework, 5–6.
6. The following are examples of Dimension 2 of the C3 Framework in each of the disciplines: D2.Civ.11.3-5. Compare procedures for making decisions in a variety of settings, including classroom, school, government, and/or society (34). D2.Eco.2.K-2. Identify the benefits and costs of making various personal decisions (36). D2.Geo.2.3-5. Use maps, satellite images, photographs, and other representations to explain relationships between the locations of places and regions and their environmental characteristics (41). D2.His.3.K-2. Generate questions about individuals and groups who have shaped a significant historical change (46).
7. C3 Framework, 21.
8. Lucy Sprague Mitchell, “Social Studies and Geography,” *Progressive Education* 11 (1934): 97-105.
9. Read about “wonderwalls” at [wonderwall.msu.edu/papers/wonderwall\\_sigraph\\_2005.pdf](http://wonderwall.msu.edu/papers/wonderwall_sigraph_2005.pdf).
10. Triangulation is a method of cross-checking data from multiple sources to search for regularities in the research data. See T. O’Donoghue and K. Punch, *Qualitative Educational Research in Action: Doing and Reflecting* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 78.