



Common Core Meltdown

The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) and its effective implantation in America's schools are very much in focus for administrators and teachers alike. Many articles that discuss the drivers behind CCSSI talk about preparedness for college and the demands of the workplace. Skills involving complex problem analysis, peer collaboration, and discussion come to the fore. For those of us from the teaching profession, it is easy to recognize that the bar just moved way up "Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives", putting tougher challenges before both teacher and student. Soon gone are the days of simple formula application, rote memorization, and teaching to the test.

Predictably, CCSSI preparedness classes focus on *teacher* preparedness, and in particular, instructional delivery. So where does that leave *student* preparedness, and his participation in successful CCSSI rollout? And does it matter? If it does, then what constitutes this preparedness, and how would we go about it? This is what I wish to address, because in the final analysis, it is the *student* that must achieve against CCSSI assessment metrics, not the school administration or faculty. After all, is it not the student that must ultimately "know and be able to do"?

In a prior series entitled "Growth and Maturity"¹ I discussed both the ends and the means for bringing about "valuable" characteristics in maturing teens. You will find that my definition of "valuable" extends well beyond the scholastic definitions contained in the CCSSI initiative. Rather, it lays the foundations for human growth, maturity, and self-actualization (Maslow). It is, however, instructive to ask whether these characteristics serve some of the purposes of CCSSI as related to the new requirements and metrics. For example, CCSSI talks about students creating arguments, discussing and comparing approaches to problem solutions, and developing analytical skills. Do the conditions of optimal growth and maturity apply?

Briefly, lets now take a look back at some characteristics of the psychologically mature individual to see how well he can participate in CCSSI with these desired skills in mind.

From the prior series I wrote about the characteristics of the psychologically mature. Here they are again in brief:

I am operating from a psychologically mature state when:

1. I have increased openness to my own experience. When I am truly open, I experience fully without distortion what comes from within, from my environment, and from others. I maintain objectivity, without undue coloring, judging, or avoiding.

¹teen-encounters.com/reference

2. I trust in myself to interact, cope, and grow with what comes to me without fear. As I begin to trust in all of who I am, I can access all of my capabilities and emotions to assimilate and grow.
3. As I continue to engage deeply with others, I naturally become more accepting and loving of others, their imperfections and frailties, as human beings. As a result, I ultimately find this same acceptance of myself. I exist more in being truly who I am.
4. I trust all of my “self” in all my capacities, and the orientation that I take. In doing so, I find the time flies by, as I am fully engaged, creative, and excited.

As I envision a student being asked to openly participate in dialogue and problem solving with others, characteristics 1-3 seem instrumental. Please read them again, and see if you agree. Consider the possible characteristics of the immature, not growing, and by definition absent these traits, and I hope you will get the point: CCSSI could be terrifying.

In regard to approach, CCSSI also purports to give great latitude to both teacher and student in accomplishing learning objectives. Accordingly, educators and students both are tasked with finding their own, personally relevant paths to success. In the case of students, in particular, having the emotional leeway and the desire to explore options to “actualize” their desired results is critical. The necessary self-trust described in (4), according to Maslow, follows from feeling accepted, of belonging, and from a love of self and others. Establishing these conditions in the classroom is challenging, non-trivial, and time-intensive.

In looking ahead, and as the English are prone to say, things go in “circles and roundabouts”. In 1983, Carl Rogers, a world-renowned American psychologist wrote “Freedom to Learn for the 80’s”. In the book, Rogers reiterates the requisites for human emotional maturity, and applies them to the classroom setting. In the book, two specific studies are highlighted, describing some rather compelling results. Roger’s cohort and Nobel Prize nominee Dr. Thomas Gordon continued this work in books “Teacher Effectiveness Training” and “Parent Effectiveness Training”, helping both teachers and parents establish optimal conditions for personal growth, and academic success.

With respect to CSSI, we have been here before, and with research-proven methods of addressing the associated problems with aplomb.

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