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Creativity In Question: The Infiltration Of The Common Core State Standards Into The Realm of Visual Arts After School Programs

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Creativity In Question

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School Programs

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Introduction

It was my junior year of college and while others were planning trips to soak up the sun on the beach, I was planning to make a trip to my old elementary school in the Bronx to complete my first ever case study for my teaching of reading class. While sitting in my 1st grade teacher's 4th grade classroom, attempting to remember how it felt to be a kid again, my nostalgia was halted by the look in my teacher's eyes. The fire that burned within her for her students was now extinguished. She proceeded to tell me about the common core state standard's (CCSS) impact on her role as a teacher as well as its impact on hand soon after, her words became a reality in my observations of her class. I will never forget the one instance that stuck out to me, an instance that is the foundation of this thesis. My teacher had been teaching her class about differentiating the main idea of a text from the supporting details of a text and was using a book about wolves to convey this lesson.

Ms. B: Who can give me a supporting detail about the wolves?

(The kids excitedly raise and wiggle their hands)

Ms. B: Kimmy?

Kimmy: Wolves eat their own kind

Ms. B: Umm. Did the books say that wolves eat other wolves? Who can help Kimmy out?

Preston: Ms. B I think I know what Kimmy means. I think she meant to say that wolves are carnivores so when she said that they eat their own kind she's saying that they eat meat. Wolves are made of meat so they eat their own kind, which is meat.

Ms. B: Nice save Preston although that's not in the book, I like the team work in making sense of Kimmy's point.

To me, that moment was priceless. It was the perfect representation of collaboration, creativity, innovation and misunderstanding. While Ms. B interpreted Kimmy's response to her question as "wolves eat other wolves," It took Preston's highlighting of Kimmy's alternative way of saying "wolves eat meat" to make known that there was actually more than one way students, in their unique ways thought about ideas. It was also though, for me, a wake up call to the reality of our educational system that steals moments like these away from students to push its standardization agenda. An agenda that makes all students speak and think in the same manner. Not only did this creative and collaborative moment stick out to me, but also the moment where Ms. B acknowledged this creativity and then minimized it because it did not coincide with the book facts verbatim. I followed up with Ms. B after that moment and asked her if she expected such a moment to occur. She replied:

Ms B: Stephanie moments like these have happened before. I love watching my kids wrestle through things, help each other out, and come up with different ways of interpreting text and words. But it all boils down to will this be on the test? I wish I could f go into deeper discussion about their ideas and make everyone of hem feel valued for providing a unique perspective to the class, but I can't. I must stick to what the book says. You know why? Because nowadays only the tests matter. As much as I hate to teach this way, I have to teach my kids to focus on what will be on he test and weed out anything that will not be on the test even if it comes at he expense of silencing heir brilliant ideas. That's just the way the cookie crumbles now.

After spending some time in the classroom, and speaking with Ms. B, I became saddened at the thought of student creativity being hindered by time constraints of teaching to the test. Fast forward to a semester later, I took an adolescent literacy course that consisted of students from a local high school coming to Vassar College to participate in an afterschool digital literacy

program. Through the class, we provided a space for these students to express their creativity through digital mediums without the pressure of anything reminiscent of the rigors of the school day. Seeing how much these students loved the space and how much they blossomed as learners, thinkers, artists, and innovators led me to think that in a perfect world, students would, if they were not inundated with the pressures to excel on standardized tests, find out the most about themselves as leaners through more freeing and expressive activities. The reality is though, that as Ms. B said, education now is about testing and how well equipped students are to pass a test. There is no longer any time to engage students in their creative thinking, cultivate their unique processing and expressions of the world in which they live, or even get to know their individual strengths and weaknesses because standardized testing and the need for schools to adhere strictly to the common takes precedence.

I noticed also that funding from the federal government had an important role to play in various schools' and teacher's time constraint within the classroom to cultivate creativity. The push for boosting test scores and outcomes trumps the desire to explore alternative means of learning material. Various schools are motivated by grants to produce pleasing test scores for the government and often work within time constraints to accomplish this task. The roadmaps for obtaining these grants are the CCSS, a compilation of standards that efficiently standardizes students and schools both intrastate and interstate. While Vassar College is a space that is very much socially aware and sensitive to the ways in which CCSS affects students in school and while my professor's creation of the adolescent literacy afterschool program provided a glimpse of what a sensitive and more progressive education system would look like, I was interested in exploring how after schools non profit organizations in the local community that relied on the aforementioned funding to serve the community as well as conforming to CCSS and

standardized testing philosophies, were running their programs. After seeking out a visual art local non-profit that served low-income communities through providing afterschool creative programming for youth at local high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools, I decided to embark on a case study of the program. I sought to investigate whether the creative nature of students being hindered by the CCSS, as I had witnessed in Ms. B's classroom, was also true for an afterschool program that, similar to my adolescent literacy experience, provided students with creative outlets through digital mediums. While there is much study done on the impact of CCSS on the classroom, I sought to shed some light on how it affects afterschool programs as well.

Literature review

Attentiveness To the Youth

"Typically, teenagers appear in our cultural talk as synonymous with crazed hormones, as delinquents, deficiencies, or clowns, that is, beings not to be taken too seriously. They are most often spoken of with familiarity, sometimes with affection, and regularly with some hostility or displeasure. (Lesko, 2012, p.1) Lesko's observations of the public perception of youth highlights the lack of cultural attentiveness paid to teens that struggle daily to make sense of who they are and the world that they live in. Lesko here highlights the ways in which the youth are mainly seen as individuals that lack self-control and understanding of the world and thus are not taken very seriously. Because of this, youth are not generally asked by adults how they interpret their world, yet adults usually interpret their world for them. Paley (1986) furthers this point and sheds light on the importance of cultural attentiveness to youth as she writes: "Any serious observation made about a birthday is worth following up, not in order to give Frederick the facts and close the subject, but to use this compelling material as a vehicle for examining his ideas of how the world works. If I am to know Frederick, I must understand, among many other things, how he perceived his mother's birthday and his grandfather's permanence. (p. 126). Here Paley hihglights that education is not so much about facts There is a call by these authors to not merely downplay the experiences of the youth, though they are fewer than that of adults, but to value these experiences because while they are fewer in number, they point to deeper and richer understanding of who they are as individuals. There is an avenue within education that can be used to help teachers "get to know the youth" on a deeper level as well as help students get to know themselves on a deeper level and that is by way of experiential learning.

Experiential Learning

"Fundamental to living in the conceptual age will be the use of creativity" (Warner & Myers, 2009, p. 29). Central to the growth and development of students in the 21st century is their ability to cultivate their creativity and making sense of this creativity through experiential learning. Kraft & Sakofs (1998) state that experiential education is the process of actively engaging students in an experience that will have real consequences. Students make discoveries and experiment with knowledge themselves instead of hearing or reading about the experiences of others. Students also reflect on their experiences, thus developing new skills, new attitudes, and new theories or ways of thinking. John Dewey (1938) was an early promoter of the idea of learning through direct experience, by action and reflection. Experiential learning differs much from traditional education in that teachers first immerse students in action and then ask them to reflect on or debrief their experience. For example, rather than merely learning about the growth cycles of plants from a textbook and a lecture from the teacher in the traditional classroom, a classroom infused with experiential learning would consist of having students grow their own plants, observe each stage of its growth cycle, and reflect on and interpret these changes from their personal perspectives. In contrast, traditional classrooms are structured in a way that teachers begin instruction by placing both the analysis and synthesis of knowledge before students. After placing that knowledge before students, teachers hope that the students will later find a means to apply that particular knowledge to their lives and put it into action in some way, shape, or form. Furthermore, in the classroom there is a different emphasis placed on experiential education. Jacobs (1999) adds that experiential education is typically viewed as an enhancement to more didactic educational approaches. Educators use experiential lessons and initiatives to foster excitement in students or to take a break from the daily grind of handouts, lectures, and assignments. Rarely is experiential education seen as a central approach to learning. I was

interested in investigating the ways in which visual arts afterschool programs could provide students with the opportunity to engage in experiential learning.

Arts and Afterschool

After school programming, an avenue for students to be engaged outside of the traditional classroom setting, is an avenue that has the capability to inspire youth to break out of their shells, be the masters of their creative minds, and engage in a vulnerable act of sharing their work with others. Art denotes a process of doing or making that involves creating something with some physical material, the body or something outside of the body, with or without the use of intervening tools, and with a view to production of something visible, audible, or tangible." The term art in and of itself is dynamic and has the capability to reflect each and every person that engages in its uniqueness (Dewey 1932/2005). Organized afterschool programs help build talents and efficacy (Larson, 2000) and support social skills and relationships with peers and adults (Barber, Stone, Junt, & Eccles, 2005; Eccles & Gootman, 2002). Afterschool programs can provide additional time for learning of basic skills and enrichment opportunities tailored to children's individual interests. They can engage students in productive, prosocial activities as an alternative to unstructured, unsupervised time that many children with working parents may put to ill use. (Fashola, p. 3) The arts represent a way for students to engage with the real life world, find a point of interaction with it and themselves and to explore ideas in a less-evaluative setting. After school programs also have the potential to integrate the students' own background and experience as part of the curriculum. "Expression through the arts opens up spaces of possibility, particularly for youth to engage and nurture the work of imagination and enact their "deliberative agency" in the ways in which they (re) write themselves." (Dimitriadis & Weis, 2001). Studies

show that afterschool programs geared specifically toward visual arts are seen to reach students in ways that they are otherwise not being reached, connect students to themselves and to each other, transform the environment for learning, provide learning opportunities for adults in the lives of young people, and connect learning experiences to the world of real work (Stevenson & Deasy, 2005, Fiske, 1999, McCarthy et al, 2004)

Benefits of Arts After School Programs

Burton, Horowitz and Abeles of Columbia University (1999) in looking at "Learning In and Through the Arts" found that students in the arts performed better than non art students on measures of creativity, fluency, originality, elaboration and resistance to closure; they took more risks in learning, and were more able to layer one thought upon another and to see problems from different perspectives. Further, they found that there is clear empirical evidence that children are less able to extend their thinking in a narrowly conceived curriculum in which the arts are either not offered or are offered in limited or sporadic amounts. The best programs for outcomes are experiential, active, hands-on, and real world. Ideally they involve small group collaborative working relationships where social and cognitive learning is combined. This is especially true for afterschool programming. The arts by their very nature are experiential and hands-on. This style of learning seems to benefit disadvantaged students in particular, but even for other students, shows greater learning outcomes than more passive strategies (Wolf, 2003; Miller, 2003a, 2003b; Huang et al, 2000; YouthARTS, 1998; Fashola, 2002 page 30). Students who participate in afterschool arts also see themselves as more able to express themselves and approach life tasks. Arts Corps' Program Evaluation Reports (2004, 2005) conducted surveys of students, parents, and program staff to examine the impact of their program to date. Their survey of a sample of parents found that parents saw their child as more outgoing, more involved in

schoolwork, happier—wants to go to school, talking with them more and wanting to do more activities, more confident in social situations, better at expressing their individuality in school, working with art at home. 87% of the parent sample reported seeing positive changes in their child since they started in the arts in afterschool.

While all the authors make valid points, research shows that afterschool's effects on students is at war with the school system's focus on accountability and high-stakes testing, which is leading to a more intensive emphasis on reaching all children, but it is inadvertently resulting in a curriculum for many low-income children that is narrower, fragmented, and oriented towards "direct instruction" instead of student-driven inquiry (Au, 2007). The CCSS, while arguably a strong baseline for student learning in the United States, are rightfully being criticized for a weak emphasis on 21st century competencies that afterschool arts programs cultivate in students such as creativity, collaboration, and communication (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2010).

Everybody is a "Same-Body"

In the past, vast differences in educational expectations existed across states. A 2010 study by the American Institutes of Research documented a huge expectations gap, with some states expecting their students to accomplish far more in school than other states with much lower standards. In essence, what a fourth grader was expected to know in math could vary dramatically depending on the state in which he or she lived. (Schmidt, 2001)

 To remedy this CCSS was created to allow educators to share a common language about what they want students to learn. CCSS essentially exists to create a focused, challenging, appropriate set of learning expectations that educators can interpret and implement locally through the

curriculum, programs, and teaching methods they decide are best suited to their students. The standards were created with the intent to help educators create consistency of expectations, clarity of learning targets, and economies of scale in the production of instructional materials carefully crafted to support student success. (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). Above all, the new standards aim to hold all students to the same high expectations for college and career readiness.

CCSS and Testing

The CCSS acts as a roadmap for teachers in organizing preparation strategies for students to perform well on standardized tests. Some schools allocate more than a quarter of the year's instruction to test prep. New York City in particular imposed daily two and a half hour prep sessions and test practice on vacation days for students after its reading and math scores plunged in 2010 (Kolodner, 2011). Many educators, because of the pressure to have their stuAdents perform well on standardized tests, look at the CCSS and conclude that the best way to affect children's learning of CCSS 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. "The problem with this is that the conception of teaching becomes drill-and-kill. Drill and kill techniques are not 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. (Hoffman, J.L., Paciga, K.A. & Teale, W.H., 2014, p. 10) Lobman (2013) discusses that a fear of performing poorly on examinations is a problem for many school- aged children. This fear exists because of the fear-inducing climate within the classroom that students experience daily. Because increasing amounts of time and energy in the classroom are spent on

preparing for standardized tests, there is very little to no emotional outlet for the students. Lobman proceeded to gather a group of urban students together, creating a space where they would not feel ridiculed or judged about expressing their feelings, to discover the ways in which pressures from their teachers and their school environment contributed to their anxiety. Lobman shares the story of a young girl who resided in a classroom where the teacher told the class that if they failed the state exam they would not be able to move on to the fifth grade. The young girl ,in a personal account, shared that she became very nervous at the mention of these threats and explained this as the derivative of her poor test scores. A boy also shared that a combination of hearing his principal enter the room and yell at the class about having his playtime stripped from him because of his principal and teacher's desire to have him devote more time to studying for the state exam stressed him out as well and also attributed in part to his poor test scores.

Straus (2012) in her critique of CCSS describes standardized tests as tests that cheat students out of the experience of being evaluated on complex thought, being able to take an exam free of cultural biases, and also allowing for alternative forms of measuring mastery of a subject in the form of non-verbal learning. In other words, the CCSS fails to take into account the unique ways in which students learn. It creates a limited scope of learning and success, only measuring specific areas like reading, writing, and math, rather than a full picture of children and how they learn, including creativity, collaboration skills, drive, social skills, etc.

CCSS effects on Creativity and Learning

CCSS is said to kill innovation. It said to strip young people of the opportunity to explore the potentials of humanness. While CCSS, containing the word "standards" gets an approving nod from the public and from most educators because it means "performance that meets a standard,"

the word standards also means "like everybody else," and standardizing minds and reproducing

the same types of individuals is what CCSS seeks to do. While CCSS fans sell the first meaning;

the CCSS standards deliver the second meaning. (Straus, 2012). Others suggest the CCSS takes

students a step above imagination and propels them forward in critical thinking and deductive

reasoning. They suggest that CCSS provides students with the opportunity to imagine, create,

and innovate with an aim. Rather than imagining for the sake of imagining, CCSS allows for

students to focus heir imaginations and creativity. (Carmichael, Sheila Byrd, et al, 2010)

Johnston (2012) uses a learning binary in his work that gives a more concrete visualization of

CCSS affects on student learning. He entitles the binaries as fixed performance framed learning

and dynamic framed learning. He explains that when students adopt fixed frame of learning

perspecitves, the mistakes they make and the failures they encounter become debilitating ,and

thus impacts their view of what learning is. For example, if students that have this outlook on

learning feel as though the task at hand will be difficult, they choose not to even try so that they

don't run the risk of looking stupid or failing. These students' main concern is about not looking

bad rather than learning something valuable from their mistakes. Johnston states that these are

students when asked when do they feel intelligent, will respond with "when I finish first," "when

I do better than others, " "when I don't make any mistakes" or "when others are struggling and it

is easy for me," which is what many of the aforementioned authors believe is central to the goals

of CCSS and standardized testing. On the other hand, a Johnston point out that the other side of

the binary is a dynamic frame approach to learning. Students with this perspective on learning

believe that learning regardless of success or failure is the ultimate goal. For these students,

making a mistake or fear of being judged for the mistake is of no importance. Johnston states:

"Dynamic theorists can afford to take on challenge because in their world, mistakes don't point to fixed and shameful inadequacies. In a dynamic world, when you run into difficulty it just means things are becoming more interesting. Challenging activities present no threat, only the promise of learning something new. The dynamic theory world is more interesting and less anxiety producing than the one constructed from fixed theories." (p. 12) Johnston here provides us with the goals of the arts for the students. These goals soon become tainted by the CCSS and its influencing of the learning philosophies and practices of teachers as they prepare their students for standardized tests.

Goals of Study

Alignment with the CCSS is a means by which many after school programs receive funding from the state government to provide after school programming for the students in their respective local communities. While there are many debates surrounding CCSS as it pertains to the traditional classroom setting, there is not as much discussion of how the CCSS seeps into the realm of afterschool programs. Specifically, my research investigates: How are afterschool programs influenced by the CCSS? How is standardization and student exposure to standardized testing influencing student ides about creativity and the artistic process? And finally what are implicit and explicit ways that CCSS is influencing afterschool programs administratively? My questions lead me to explore the literature that addresses the role and importance of creativity and expression for low-income students in afterschool programs, the ways that experiential learning afterschool programs benefits these students, and the ways that student creativity and administration of these afterschool programs are affected by the presence of CCSS and standardized testing.

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine

1) How are afterschool programs influenced by the CCSS?

2) How is standardization and student exposure to standardized testing influencing student ides about creativity and the artistic process? And finally

3) What are implicit and explicit ways that CCSS is influencing afterschool programs administratively?

This chapter serves to (1) Describe the Research Methodology of this study (2) explain the sample selection (3) describe the procedure used in designing the instrument and collecting the data, and (4) provide an explanation of the procedures used to analyze the data.

A Qualitative Approach

I used a qualitative research approach because the research questions that I sought to answer do not lead me to a quantitative approach. These questions, I felt, would best be addressed after physically witnessing them the activities in afterschool and experiencing he unfolding of these answers in a ore intimate way. Through this particular qualitative research, I gathered an in depth understanding of student behavioral responses to a particular CCSS infiltrated afterschool program centered on media and digital literacy called ZDT. ZDT is a Visual Arts non-profit organization based in New York State that aims to serve low-income youth in their community by providing visual art afterschool programs within the schools that these students attend. Their main goals are to provide these students with visual arts outlets in the form of videography instruction, animation instruction, digital art instruction, photography instruction, and digital editing instruction, empower students to discover and embrace their creative identities and skills, to have students transform their neighborhoods and schools through the use of digital media. The

organization proposes to not only enhance students' creative selves, but also seeks to enhance students' academic selves. They believe that through their afterschool programs, students will gain he motivation to excel in school. I conducted a case study at ZDT and this case study consisted of consistent site visits to Elementary school A, B, and Middle School C, coupled with observations and detailed field notes during these class visits.

Sampling Method

I made 21 site visits to the three different schools, randomly assigned to me by the director of education at the non-profit organization. Between the three programs, I observed a total of 80 hours of instruction. School A's and School B's afterschool program consisted of 4th and 5th graders while School C consisted of a mixture of 6th, 7th, and 8th graders. Students in School A, and B were given the exact same tasks from week to week and School C was given a similar task from week to week with more advanced concepts infused in the curriculum. I took detailed field notes of the activities and projects that the students worked on as well worked closely with these students on these activities and observed their behavioral (non verbal and verbal) responses to the language of CCSS (implicit or explicit) within the material and language of the lead teachers. I also be conducted a series of structured and unstructured interviews for the lead teachers of the program as well as for the director of education of the non-profit organization.

Interviews

The structured interviews were aimed specifically at the ways in which the organization aligned their curriculum to the CCSS for the afterschool programs. The structured interviews served the purpose of answering the why's and how's of CCSS alignment for this program. The unstructured interviews were aimed at a variety of facets of the CCSS and its affects on the

behaviors and languages of both the teachers and the students in the classroom when referring to the CCSS. These interviews served the purpose of exposing the (Who) behind the CCSS. There were spur of the moment and follow-up questions that arose during staff and intern round table debriefs. These informal interviews were recorded with an Iphone. Data collection was conducted throughout organization's operating hours on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday from 1pm-5pm in order to gather information from the lead teachers and staff before afterschool began.

Method of Analysis

The data was analyzed in two different ways. I used analytic coding where I provided an analysis of descriptive responses and grouped them conceptually. I highlighted, organized, and collapsed CCSS lingo or allusions to the common core within my field notes and used them as the basis for the formation of the study. Through this method I gathered sufficient vocabulary to answer questions of how instructors of these after school programs used the language of the CCSS both in speech and through the work and activities they presented and distributed to the students. I also found the appropriate vocabulary to capture student experiences, responses, and awareness of CCSS in their afterschool programs through collapsing a variety of responses, body language, and or euphemisms they used to allude to the CCSS. I also executed the coding method for my series of structured and unstructured interviews and gathered the vocabulary for organizing my data. I grouped language from both the structured and unstructured interview that alluded to funding and the pressure the CCSS puts on organizations to compete for funding, the implicit and explicit ways that the CCSS affected the students as well as the administration. The terms that emerged were "fundable," "competition," "Paradox," "Camouflage," "Anxiety," and "Assessment," and "Triggers."

Analyzing Pattern Development

I used the method of an analytic quilt to identify the patterns that developed between schools A, B, and C. I listened closely for student speech and responses to the course material across the three schools and attempted to find a recurring pattern that weaved together the experiences of the students, which provided for an in depth analysis of CCSS and its effects on student performance outside of school. What I found across the 3 schools was that students experienced some form of performance anxiety when faced with creative tasks, that there were triggers of CCSS that affected students across the 3 schools, and that teachers across the three schools in some form attempted to camouflage the CCSS. I also noticed pattern development amongst the administrators and teachers' structured and unstructured interviews. What I found across these interviews was that ZDT administration possessed an indirect competitive mentality in regards to obtaining funding from the state for their programs and teacher camouflaging of CCSS and masking CCSS lingo from students. The analysis of this data can attempt to answer larger questions of the organization's intentions with the community of inner city youth they serve; whether to provide an avenue for students to genuinely pursue their creative interests or to cultivate and maintain a hub of resources and longevity through acquiescence to the rules of the state.

What Else Do Cows Do?

Walking into ZDT was like walking into a creative digital hub. Mac desktops resided on every table and mac laptops on every shelf. They all possessed names of super hero characters and were referred to by each other as such. Names like "Thor" "Flash" and "Hulk" filled the room constantly. It was usual to see, when I walked in every afternoon, the live filming of their promotional materials at the office, staff using the immense amount of iPads they possessed to update their instagram page, a big screen and projector that displayed video recordings of students and their work, many of the staff and interns editing videos on Final Cut Pro, Photoshop and Adobe software along with virtual pens used for digital drawing were mounted onto the computer, lights, tripods, sound systems, and DSLR cameras were organized by brand in the cabinets. While I was astounded by how expensive their equipment was, I tried not to get distracted by it in hopes that I could dig deeper into the organization.

Fear of Risk Taking

"Good Afternoon Susan, is it possible I can ask you some questions for my study on your after school programs?" I said to the director of the local non-prfofit ZDT as I saw that she was not as busy today. "Good afternoon Stephanie, she replied excitedly. Yes of course step into my office!" I had about 30 min until I was supposed to go and work at School 1 for the day and I needed to debrief with her some observations I had been making and also hear her perspective on these observations through a series of question. As I moseyed over to her office, which literally was a desk in the corner of the room, I chuckled and proceeded to debrief my observations with her. I had been observing her afterschool classes at 3 different schools for about a month at the time. Susan synchronized each school's lesson plans to follow the same objective after each

couple of weeks so the 3 different schools I attended were working on similar projects. I began to notice while at each school that the students did not seem to be very excited about the creative writing and brainstorming process. After the teacher handed them brainstorming worksheets and split them into groups with a lead teacher overseeing each group and helping them to rev up their creative engines, some students were fidgety, ran around the room, were very quiet, were unfocused, and refused to contribute to the creative process altogether, with the exception of the very few that were engaged. I, at first, dismissed the notion that it could be anything more than kids being kids, but I immediately caught myself labeling these young students as Lesko (2012) describes as (see chapter 2) "beings not to be taken too seriously" and in my lack of investigation of the reason for their behavior, I was not giving myself an opportunity to get to know these students and find nuances in what might actually be affecting their creative processes. I decided to investigate how their school day might be affecting the attitudes they were bringing to afterschool. Knowing that the CCSS was a huge part of their day I asked Susan how she believed the CCSS affected the students that attended her afterschool programs She replied:

The Common Core stresses out students in deep, pervasive ways we see unfold in our programs all the time. Even though our programs occur during Out of school time/extracurricular time, we observe their anxiety when faced with what they perceive to be official tests that "count." When writing their names on drawings, for example, they often ask if spelling "counts" as though they expect that anything they do will be graded and judged along a numerical scale. Sometimes we hand out instructions for a more complicated activity, and when the students see sheets of paper with typed text on them, they become very anxious and squirmy and have trouble focusing at the very sight of typed-papers resembling tests. (February 12, 2015)

I began to understand that more than kids just being kids were some performance anxieties that were built up from their school atmospheres; performance anxiety, defined here as students' apprehension to take risks during afterschool because of their fear of being assessed, judged, or surveyed. Assessment is a normal part of students' day- to -day routines in school and the feeling of being scrutinized, assessed, and possibly penalized or affirmed, which are characteristics of school testing atmospheres, seemed to pervade their after school atmosphere. As my data shows, the CCSS and its affiliation with standardized testing negatively affects students even while in after school programs. During the school day students are exposed to tense atmospheres and drill and kill teaching methods (see chapter 2) that focus on getting them to pass standardized tests. There is not much time for teachers to explore each student's unique style of learning or creative abilities. Therefore students may not be used to freely expressing themselves and may carry over into afterschool the attitude that the freedom to think, feel, and express themselves is wrong if it is not linked to an assessment of some sort. Their creative risk taking in this visual art centered program is then compromised for fear that it will be assessed. Lobman (2013) (See Chapter 2) highlights the anxiety that students experience in school, which also, as observed in my findings, infiltrates afterschool.

The director spoke about the CCSS in relationship to how her program was run before the standards were instituted. She continued,

Before common core, something as simple as writing a story was seen as fun, but 65% of students ask, 'does spelling count?' . When they are very young they have an idea that there is a judging entity out there that is observing and evaluating them. They are too young to understand, but old enough to feel a sense of being on stage and being under prepared. That's sense that they

are not safe to play and take risks because they never know when it might be used against them.
(February 12, 2015)

Questions of whether spelling counts as mentioned in interview 1 highlights two things 1) the student is fearful of being judged on his or her ability to spell because of his or her belief that flawless spelling constitutes an exceptional work of art and that by misspelling words, their work is somehow disqualified from being deemed exceptional or 2) the student's question could point to a deeply held desire for students to own their creative identities and enact their "deliberative agency"." (Dimitriadis & Weis, 2001) (see Chapter 2), and thus a question of whether spelling counts consists more of the student feeling out the environment to know whether it is safe to embrace their identity as a creative thinker or whether they should wear their common core thinking caps to approach assignments. What students are asking when they ask about spelling is whether spelling will count against them. The question of "does it count?" sets boundaries on the creative process of the students and leads them to confine their experience to being right or wrong.

As the director of the program stated above, before CCSS something as simple as writing a story was seen as fun or a means by which students could create their own individualized enjoyment. Therefore this question of "Does it count" also translates into "am I aloud to have fun?" The fact that students ask if spelling counts and not if creativity counts speaks to the way the culture of testing within schools influences students to value correctness over creativity. Creativity, characterized by spontaneity, boundless imaginations, and freedom of speech and thought without judgment, is hindered by the culture of standardized testing as it leaves student's on

guard, paranoid, and afraid of owning a work of art that belongs to them even before they begin to create it.

 Every afternoon at ZDT the lead teachers and I were responsible for packing film equipment to take the schools for the students. 3 Camcorders? Check. 3 Mac Laptops check. Tripod? Check. Construction paper? Regular paper? Markers? Scissors? Check. It was the month of October and according to the afterschool curriculum, it was "film a skit" month, where ZDT's various after school programs were scheduled in the curriculum to work on creating a script that would eventually lead to a skit that the students would film. This was the week I was scheduled to work with the middle school afterschool program. After playing an icebreaker game, which got the students to laugh, work together, and warm up to one another, the teacher lead them into the classroom and explained the task for the day, which was that in two groups they would create a skit. He assured them that they had total creative control over the structure and the creation of the characters. The teacher also told the students to assign themselves roles for the filming portion of the assignment in heir respective groups. He wanted someone in each group to be the director, someone to be in charge of sound, someone to be the creative director, someone to capture footage for ZDT's student work portfolio, someone to control lighting, and someone to capture still photography of the scene. The teacher also handed out a guideline sheet of the format of a skit, just in case the students were unfamiliar about how to begin crafting their skits. The handout was comprised of character names followed by colons and lines for each character. It also contained some narration of the setting of the skit and some background of the characters. It also detailed physical gestures made by each character that would help characters know how to act out their part. The teacher split the class into two groups and told them to begin creating. Hs also

assigned assistant teachers to sit in on each group and listen carefully to the students' interactions and help guide their understanding of the assignment. I was assigned to group 1 and the lead teacher also sat in on group 1's discussion and prompted them to start thinking about possible scenarios and character names for the script. The students were quiet. The teacher prompted them to begin with being as creative as possible with names of characters. He discussed with the assistant teachers before we go to the school that he intentionally made the names of the characters "wack" or in other words, named the characters student 1 and student 2 on the guideline sheet so that the students would be inspired to change them. I carefully listened to what was said in the brainstorming process:

> *Teacher: Those names are wack. No seriously they're boring, what would you guys like to change them to? (He said while looking at the guideline sheet)*
>
> *5 Students: (silence)*
>
> *Teacher: Maybe Colgate Winter-fresh? Aquafina? Poland Spring?*
>
> *5 Students: (Silence)*
>
> *Teacher: Come on guys I know you have creative minds, come up with something while I'm checking on the other group.*
>
> *Student 1 to the group: How do you spell the names of those people he just said? How you spell Aquafina? Is this right? (Paper says Akuafeena)*
>
> *Student 2: Let's just leave it as student 1 and student 2, it's easier like that.*
>
> *(Rest of students nod in agreement)*
>
> *5 students leave the names as student 1 and student 2. (not deviating from original)*

As we see here, the students are in an environment where they are encouraged to be as creative as possible, in this instance. The teacher gives them choice, which is extremely important in promoting creativity, and the students 1) refuse to utilize that choice 2) believe that whatever the teacher suggests is the safest possible route to go, and 3) believe that if they use the teacher's ideas they will be evaluated on how well they spelled them as the migrating factor of success. What repels them from either option is the fear of being assessed as 'wrong' whether by their peers or by their teacher. This illustrates the ways in which CCSS hinders creativity in that it socializes students to believe that their creativity should be hidden before it is assessed. It also illustrates the ways in which CCSS sets up a binary about learning that dichotomizes learning and promotes a fixed frame form of learning versus a dynamic frame of learning.

Learning Binary

Johnston (2012) (See Chapter 2) discusses the idea of a learning binary entitled fixed performance framed learning and dynamic framed learning.   Fixed performance framed learning impacts the philosophies of what learning is to students in that it is characterized by students confining their learning experiences to being right or wrong. Students adopting this fixed frame of learning refuse to take risks in learning outside of their scope of comfortability so that they don't run the risk of looking stupid or failing. These students' main concern is more about not looking bad rather than learning something valuable from their mistakes. CCSS in this same regard instills in students that intelligence is characterized by safer choices and those safer choices are in alignment with what the teachers says. What should be noted about the interaction between the teacher and the students above is that while the students used the teacher's new idea for character names, they exhibited this fixed framed approach when they could not spell the names. Rather than taking the risk of misspelling the names and possibly creating something

unique, their notions of what is incorrect leads and fear of being judged leads them to choose the path of least resistance. Because students have in mind what seems to be correct, they miss out on the opportunity to turn their "mistakes" into creations. We also see above this question within of "does it count" when one of the students asks another student if his spelling of akuafeena is right. From the data we can broaden the interpretation of "does it count" to include "will this mistake make me look bad in the eyes of the teacher?"

On the other hand, the other side of the binary is a dynamic frame approach to learning. This approach to learning is characterized by the belief that learning, irregardless of success or failure, is the ultimate goal. For people that adopt this learning philosophy, making a mistake or fear of being judged for the mistake is of no importance. This is the philosophy that generates creativity and imaginative freedom, a philosophy that ZDT strongly believes in, which is evident in middle school teacher giving the students total creative control over their skits. The problem lies in what the students are exposed to during the school day by way of CCSS. Students are taught, through the culture of standardized testing, that there is one answer that is the correct answer and that correct answer can only be obtained by remembering what the teacher has taught in the classroom. This embodies a fixed frame of learning philosophy in that students are taught that there is one way to approach a learning situation and that any approach outside of this is deemed wrong. While students are anxiety ridden during the school day with strategies to choose the correct answers on standardized testing, or use a fixed framed learning philosophy, they bring the same experience into afterschool, which prevents them from embracing the experience of learning in different forms. We see this in the students' agreement to use the teacher's ideas instead of coming up with heir own. Because they are socialized in school to adopt a standard

way of approaching learning, they become resistant to the creative freedom that their afterschool teacher gives them and use his ideas instead.

Triggers of Fear

As I walked into elementary school A's afterschool classroom with the other assistant teachers, the room was utterly chaotic. Students were screaming and jumping around, the lead teacher was looking for soothing music to calm the students down, and we were given the task of getting the students started on their creative stories that would later be turned into animations. November was, according to ZDT's curriculum animation month, and students of each grade level of the afterschool programs were being taught about how to make an animation. The students were split into two groups and told to come up with a creative story that they would later animate. Each of the assistant teachers was asked to sit in on a group. I worked closely with group 2.

Group 2's story was called bleh bleh bleh bleh. During the writing process, I watched the students enthusiastically create a fantasy world called bleh bleh bleh bleh where everyone spoke bleh bleh and tried to find a queen for king Bleh Bleh. The story almost mirrored the story of Cinderella. There had come a point in the day where I was responsible for video recording the students reading their stories and embodying the different characters. We had done some practice before the filming and students appeared to be excited to film. The teacher announced to the students that I would be filming them and that the footage would be taken back to office to be looked over by our "Org Friends." As I congregated the students in the hallway and yelled action, their faces became blank, their reading devoid of enthusiasm, they began to stutter while reading, and a couple of the students ran back inside the classroom saying that they no longer wished to participate in the filming.

Alongside, fixed notions of what is correct/incorrect, the CCSS also influences how students react emotionally to new learning situations. Interview 1 highlights this idea that because students form negative outlooks on testing, anything remotely reminiscent of testing reminds them of negative feelings of anxiety and thus causes them to become fidgety, unfocused, and anxious when presented with these triggers. Triggers of this anxiety can be, as the director stated in interview 1, sheets of paper with typed text on them, which resemble tests. I make the point here that, just like the papers with type text as Susan highlighted in her interview (see chapter 3) served as a reminder of CCSS and anxiety, the camera also serves as a trigger of assessment. I am aware that the students' response to the camera could very well be due to their disliking of being filmed by the camera or simply camera shyness. While some individuals don't necessarily like to be filmed and become nervous at the sight of a camera, I believe that in this instance it is the students' perception of what this camera represents that triggers their anxiety. We see in the observation above that before the camera was used to film the students reading their stories, the students did not have trouble with taking full ownership of the parts they had contributed to the story, creating the unique title, as well as with embodying their imaginary characters. The teacher's qualifying of the camera as a device that held footage that would be taken back to the organization and would be watched by the other staff could have very well triggered their anxiety in that their association with the camera now is more than one for recreational documentation, but now is seen as a device that holds material that could potentially be used against them. As they see the camera, which they view as a device that will document their exemplary work, a device that signifies that they need to be prepared to achieve perfection on the first try, a device with characteristics of CCSS in the classroom, they get discouraged, no longer read with the same enthusiasm, and freeze due to performance anxiety.

Emulation

I also had the opportunity to work with elementary classroom B during animation month. Like

elementary school B, the students were restless and running around the classroom. The lead

teacher yelled "Uh Uh I don't play that! Everybody find a seat and sit down now!" The kids

scrambled to find a seat as she proceeded to introduce the students to a new icebreaker that she

believed would calm them down. The game consisted of the students passing around ABC

flashcards with animals, fruits, or objects on them and as a large group they (20 students) had to

create and complete a full story aloud in a circle.

Teacher starts with a card with a cow on it:

Teacher: One day there was a cow named Susan

Next Student: Susan the cow was on a farm

Next Student: Susan the cow was on a farm eating grass

Next Student: Susan the cow was on the farm eating grass and giving milk

Next Student: Susan the cow was on the farm, eating grass, giving milk, and I don't know

what else do cows do?

Teacher: Okay let's get creative guys! It doesn't have to be a regular story about a cow. It

can be a cow that flies into outer space!

We see here how the students try to emulate just what the teacher has stated, not straying too

far from what they think she wants and again a prompting from the teacher encouraging and

reminding the students that the afterschool classroom is a safe space to creatively and freely

express themselves. This mentality that is very much associated with the CCSS, knowing

factual information, hearing it from the teacher, and staying within her line of thought in

order to be considered correct is present here. Because the teacher started the story with her

line about a cow, students attempted to stay within what they assumed to be her line of thought, which they believed was things a cow does, what a cow eats, etc. As the story goes on more and more students follow the same pattern. The students believe that factual information will have them be accepted by their teacher.

Competition or Team Work?

CCSS and the culture of testing have placed more of an emphasis on individualism than collaboration. The director of the non-profit organization that I have been studying feels similarly. When asked if she believed if the competitive characteristics of CCSS built into traditional schooling trickled down into student behavior in afterschool and hindered group work and collaboration she responded:

I do think the competitiveness built into the traditional schooling structure extends to student behavior in the after-school setting. Sometimes students rush to be the first to finish, as though they're used to the act of finishing first and conferring superiority onto the finisher. (January 15, 2015)

Her observation of her students proves to be accurate, as it has played out countless times in my visits to the school.

On December 2, 2014 I worked closely with students at the afterschool program at elementary school #1 and the students were placed into groups and were told to 1) assign roles to each person and 2) come up with a unique storyboard as a team that they would later as a team animate. When it was time to begin brainstorming, all of group 1, the group that I was assigned to work with, began to talk at me simultaneously with their ideas. As I slowed them down to complete the first task, which was assigning roles, they spent most of the time

fighting over the most prestigious sounding role, or the role that carried the most weight. I stepped in to offer particular roles to the quieter students so that they would have their voices be heard and finally got all the students to agree on these roles. The more vocal students could not help but overshadow the quieter students and try to one up one another with ideas for the storyboard.

Here we see that students within afterschool are bringing the competitive environment into afterschool. Students, as Johnston (2012) would say feel smartest when they finish first and when others are struggling. The CCSS thus socializes students to adopt fixed-framed philosophies of learning where they not only want to be right, but they also want to be superior to their peers. Johnston (2012) discusses in the importance of students thinking together and working together. He states that there is strength in collaboration and discusses the ways in which our educational system does not take the gift of collaboration as seriously because of their view of students through the lens of their individual academic development and the individual cognitive process they will need to succeed on individual tests. While some competition is healthy, it is unhealthy to base feelings of success on the shortcomings of others. CCSS thus creates this hierarchy of intelligence that students feel as though they need to reach to feel smart. CCSS and standardized testing is very narrow on its perspectives of intelligence and reduces intelligence to efficiency and superiority. It fails to highlight the timely process of creativity that can be an attribute of one's intelligence as well as the fusion of each individual's knowledge of the world that makes for meaningful learning.

Similarly, elementary afterschool #2 faced the same issue.

On December 5, 2014, I worked closely with students in elementary school

#1 on an assignment that entailed listing the steps to making French toast in order and drawing the steps on the worksheet. Students were encouraged to work together and help their peer in need. A mixture of students rushed to finish first, while the others that took more time to finish worked independently. As I was working with one group, certain students within the group constantly complained that another student's picture was better than their own and some were frustrated that they were not working as a team. Some students rushed through the work and handed it in to the lead teacher. When the lead teacher asked them if their peer group had looked over it, they said they already knew how to do it on their own.

Students in their day-to-day experience with traditional schooling witness competition daily as they receive grades and are ranked in comparison to other students. Because of the competitive atmosphere of traditional schooling and the goal of the CCSS to create highly competent students who will be able to compete amongst other well qualified students, students already have ingrained in their mind that learning is about competition regardless of the setting they are in. when learning becomes competitive, students miss out on an opportunity to appreciate one another for their different capabilities, skills, and talents. Instead they learn to compare themselves o others and validate and invalidate themselves based on the successes and/ or failures of others. (Alger, 2014)

We witness here several impacts of the CCSS on students. It

1. Impacts students' philosophy on learning and causes them to look at learning from a
    fixed framed perspective

2. Due to students association with CCSS materials (typed text on sheets of paper resembling tests) or words that are associated with assessment, anxiety is triggered within students.

3. The uniqueness of individual students' thought process is standardized by emulation of the teacher, which is a characteristic of the CCSS

4. It instills in students the need to finish first and compete against their peers.

While the CCSS impacted students in the afterschool program in a variety of ways, it also impacted the teachers and administrators of the program in a variety of ways. In many ways the CCSS puts these people of authority between a rock and a hard place.

The Chopping Block

Competition Within The Organization
In chapter 5, I highlighted that CCSS and standardized testing is known to create a

competitive vibe amongst students, I also noticed its effects on non- profit organizations

serving urban youth in the area.

"Stephanie we're about to stat our meeting, want to join us?" we were about to begin our

weekly check in and action plan meting, where Susan, the director would let us know what

was on the agenda for the kids for the month as well as ask for updates about the afterschool

programs. I walked over to table where the meeting was being held and saw Susan frantically

typing on her computer as if she had a deadline to meet. I asked her what she was working

on and she told me that she was putting together the ZDT portfolio for the state so that ZDT

could receive a grant for their program. "Its our attempt to appear more fundable," she said

accompanied with a light chuckle. I followed up with an inquiry about what she meant by

fundable and asked whether non-profits had to compete for funding. First the director

replied:

Our non-profit is invested in serving youth in our area, and we really value the doors this
grant has opened in terms of getting into a working relationship with (Grant Program A). In
hopes that we can work with (Grant Program A) to continue to do all of our 21st Century
programs after the grant's 3 year period is up, we want to make ourselves indispensable to
them. We need to show that the skills youth practice in our programs help them improve their
reading, writing, listening, and speaking, and that the additional practice with these skills in
a fun, recreational, project-based media education environment contributes to students'
increased test scores. (January 2015)

Here she discusses the organizations partnership with grants from the state and the

stipulations that come with being funded by these grants. She goes on to discuss the mission

and intentions of the organization. She continues:

Since our non-profit does not have access to students' test scores themselves (and nor would we want to, really, we're more interested in other forms of assessment), we need alternative ways of demonstrating that our after-school media programs help students improve their literacy and life skills. This is why our non-profit implements several different assessment strategies to measure student growth and progress. Our non-profit isn't required to teach to the Common Core, but our mission is to serve youth, and as long as a Common Core-driven public school system is what students are facing, we're going to gear our media education programs towards helping them succeed.

She then proceeds to discuss the indirect linkage between CCSS and the competition between non-profit organizations. She continues:

Finally, in terms of competition between non-profits for funding, it's not directly tied to the Common Core, but because of all of the factors described above, it makes sense for non-profits who wish to be successful working with schools right now to acknowledge and address the reality of Common Core and how it impacts our students and their schools. In other words, our non profit is not required by our contract with Grant program A to prove our programs help students gain Common Core skills, but we want them to want to work with us, so it's important to take how Common Core fits into our work if we want to keep working with districts like Grant program A where Common Core is a primary concern.

The answer she gave seemed to answer part of my initial question about appearing fundable yet

also averted the portion about whether competition existed between non-profits for the grant.

Her statement of "but we want them to work with us" seems to imply that her organization

wanted to be chosen as the fittest organization to serve the youth with grant A.

While the director steered clear of addressing the way in which CCSS affected competitiveness

between non profit organizations, one of the lead teachers gave me more insight into the way the

organization viewed themselves in comparison to other organizations. This came about by way

of another conversation that we had about ZDT's pre assessments for the students.

Pre-assessments and Camouflage

While the director and all the teachers were having our weekly meeting to check in on student

progress and hear from the director about new ideas she wanted to incorporate into the curriculum,

she discussed with us her desire to have pre-assessments for the students implemented that particular week of mid November. She explained to me that pre-assessments were implemented every year and they were used as a way to see where students were literacy-wise. The pre-assessments were sheets of paper with prompts for the students to use vocabulary words to create a story. The length of each story varied by grade level and was based on the length of an essay on the students' respective state exam grade level. When she used the words "fundable" to describe what their organization would look like to the state if they added the pre-assessments to their portfolio, I immediately asked a follow up question. After overhearing her and the lead teachers discuss how difficult it is to implement the pre-assessments every year, I asked a follow-up question. When asked if the reason students were not responding well to the pre-assessments were due to how reminiscent it was of CCSS testing, the director and lead teachers replied:

> *We decided to change our assessment approaches this year because last year our pre-assessments and post assessments were so similar to the testing students are exposed to in school. As soon as we were like alright we're just going to take a little quiz, they were like QUIZ??? NOOOOO!*
>
> *Right? (speaking to teacher 1) how freaked out were they?*
>
> *(Teacher 1): They were totally freaked out. We changed it the next time we didn't say it was a quiz we said we're just going over some things, some words.*
>
> *Director: They could still tell though. They're smart.*
>
> *Teacher 2: Yea they knew the deal. They yelled this is a spelling test!*
>
> *Director: They were basically spelling tests so basically this year instead of giving them a blank sheet of paper and telling them to spell this or that word, we are giving them a list of*

words and asking them to put it into context, which they seem to enjoy much more than the

spelling tests. It's nice to give them somewhat of a break from school. (November, 2015)

We see here a couple of things. One, we see here this mention of performance anxiety again that hinders students' ability to perform to their fullest potential (see chapter 4). The director and the teachers reminisce about a time where students heard the word quiz and could not contain their anxiety so much so that they had to change the way they presented the pre assessment. Notice here the mention of students yelling and "freaking out" followed by the word "NO" over the mere word quiz. Even while the teachers framed it as a "little quiz," as something that would be terse and possibly even painless, students are reluctant to acquiesce. Two, we see here that the structure of the quiz was very overwhelming even though it was characterized by the word "little." In chapter 4, the director mentions that about 65% of students ask if spelling counts before they begin even the most creative assignments. It is not a surprise to hear of their reluctance to take a spelling test, which consisted of a blank sheet of paper and commands from the teacher to spell certain words. Three, we also see the director's understanding of student test anxiety and her transforming of pre-assessment structure spoke volumes about her desire to give students a break from traditional schooling methods of assessment. But how exactly was she and the rest of the organization going to please the state, who gave them funding for the program and also establish a less stressful atmosphere for the student to be able to take the assessment? Camouflage. If the organization could get the students to believe that the pre-assessment was not a test, they could probably painlessly get the students to acquiesce. I noticed this use of camouflage in my observations.

In Mid November, I observed all three afterschool classrooms during the implementation of the pre-assessment. While the teachers administered the tests, the director made a surprise visit and was video recording the students while they were working. The interactions were as follows:

Elementary school A: The teacher and director come inside the classroom overly excited and energetic and ask the students "Are You Ready For a CHALLENGE?" students yell back "YEAH." The director states: if you all complete this challenge I have a special treat for you! The students look excited and state: "What's the treat?" Director states: you're going to be featured in our organization's film festival documentary!" One student responded: "All that work for that?" The teacher and director pull out the assessments and place them in front of the students. "AWWW MAN NOT AGAIN" fills the room and some students push their chairs back and run around the classroom, some students ignore the paper and continue coloring as they had previously been doing, and a few students actually worked on the assignment. "Does spelling count?" also filled the room and after the teacher and director assured them that it didn't, they replied, "good because I'm tired of spelling." One student whispered to another: "I thought today was going to be a fun day." As I walked around the room to check on how the students that were actually writing were doing, I noticed that most of them had written one paragraph and used one vocabulary word for each sentence, which was not enough to be characterized as a story long word bank in a story in a story.

Elementary school B behaved in the same manner as elementary school #1 when presented with the same introduction to the pre-assessment. As the teacher gave out the pre-assessments, she masked it as a challenge. The students asked if it was a test. Even after the teacher assured them that it was not a test, the students still moaned and groaned. A couple of students made the

comment that they had been working in school all day and that they didn't understand why they had to do work outside of school. The teacher encouraged the students that it would not take long and that they would soon begin to "have fun"

Here again we see the students' ability to decipher this camouflage of the CCSS. We also see this afterschool vs. day school mutual exclusivity again where the teacher makes the comment about the students "having fun" after they complete the assessment. This teaches to students to associate day school with laboriousness and anxiety all the while associating afterschool with enjoyment and freedom from assessment.

We see here that the teacher and director's attempt to camouflage the CCSS has backfired. There are a couple of things that I want to highlight here. One thing I have noticed is that the director and teachers sets up a mutually exclusive relationship between afterschool and day school for the students yet does not do the same for the state. This use of camouflage, or masking the CCSS so as to not incite anxiety within the students gives us insight into the teachers' motives to make students believe that they have left the traditional classroom and that afterschool provides them with a different atmosphere. The director in her interview above uses the word "break" as she describes the relief the organization tries to give students from actual school, highlighting the mutual exclusivity of afterschool and day school.

Meanwhile the state is led to believe that teachers and administrators within this particular afterschool program are being funded to actually use creative means to present their afterschool as an extension of the school day through the implementation of CCSS.

Competitiveness Revealed and Pressures to Please

While the director steered clear of addressing the way in which CCSS affected competitiveness between non profit organizations above, one of the lead teachers gave me more insight into the way the organization viewed themselves in comparison to other organizations. This came about by way of the aforementioned discussion about pre-assessments. When I asked the teacher if the pre-assessment was required he responded with:

No. It's just something that our ZDT wanted to do. It's smart actually because if one day the states ask us for it, we already have the data. We can show that we are doing something. You know that they are actually learning something. We will be the ones that at the end who will keep getting the grant and any other programs who are not showing any kind of progress will be the ones on the chopping block. (December, 2015)

 Going back to our discussion about competition, here we see that there is somewhat of an indirect competition between non-profit organizations over grants. The term " chopping black" connotes a situation in which someone or something is threatened with elimination. Just as the CCSS creates an intelligence hierarchy that students wish to be at the top of, it also creates a hierarchy for non-profit organizations to compete to gain the grant. Here we see this same fixed framed mentality present again where instead of someone saying they feel smart when someone doesn't know the answer and they do or "when I finish first" and when "others are struggling but I finish first," this non-profit is saying "We feel like winners when we finish first" and "we feel like winners when other organizations are struggling to put together a great portfolio of student progress from the state, but we finish first in that area." CCSS indirectly and directly creates division wherever it is involved. This point I raise is not a criticism of organizations seeking to be funded, it is simply an observation of the indirect impact CCSS has on anything it is affiliated with. We see here that ZDT is caught in a dilemma. Their dilemma is how can we provide

students with a break from traditional schooling, camouflage testing as fun, fulfill our obligations to the state, yet at the same time maintain our integrity to the students we serve and not bribe them? These are difficult questions to answer.

What is the Verdict: Common Core Paradox

On January 15th, 2015 I asked the director of the program if CCSS in her program has aided in the inspiration of collaboration or competition she replied:

> *In truth, the Common Core does both. By laying out very clear expectations of what skills students are expected to have, the Common Core does give teachers a structure and framework to work with that can be extremely valuable when mapping out curricula and incorporating group work. But there are problems too. The focus on preparation for standardized testing and proficient scoring on these exams leaves little room for generating more collaborative thinking. Some students just want to be better than one another. (January, 2015)*

Ironically the CCSS has properties that promote team-based learning. Markham (2012) in his blog Project-Based Learning and Common Core Standard highlights that CCSS identify collaboration and teamwork as a 21st century skill to be taught. He states:

> This is laudable, but something bigger is under way. As the outside world shows us, we're moving into a collaborative culture of continuous learning within networked communities. The Common Core State Standards implicitly recognize this fact, but PBL teachers give it life in the classroom by using team contracts, peer collaboration rubrics, and work ethic rubrics to turn group work into effective teams. This guidance is a necessity for a curriculum that emphasizes problem solving and inquiry, now generally done in the real world in project teams (p.3)

He makes the claim that CCSS has the agenda to prepare students for the real world and that they are somehow being trained to work in the same manner as project teams in the corporate world, but why aren't students then being tested on how to effectively work in groups? Why are they solely tested individually and compared to one another nationally? Why do standardized tests not include a group work component? While the common core in its specificity and detailed structure may provide avenues for teacher's to incorporate group work into their lesson plans, this does not necessarily guarantee collaborative thinking and learning. The claims of the common core valuing the collaborative efforts of students seem to be contradictory. While the director in her claim that CCSS promotes collaborative work as well a competition, frames CCSS as a paradox, I would frame it more as a contradiction being that standardized tests are not reflective of collaborative thinking, but by individualistic fixed frame thinking.

Experiential Learning and Collaboration

While I would not give CCSS the credit for fostering authentic collaborative thinking and teamwork, afterschool visual arts programs such as the organization that I have studied very closely remind students of the need to work together to create. I was interested in finding out how experiential learning programs as such attempted to rectify the CCSS negative influences on student behavior in afterschool and asked the director how this organization was able to promote collaborative learning while having to incorporate the same standards that essentially divides students through assessment. She replied:

Of course, with art, speed isn't the priority, and we try to stress to students that what matters

most is whether they are happy and satisfied with how their work matches the idea in their

heads. However, I need to stress that students are resilient and while a competitive model is most familiar to them, they are still very capable of collaborating to do group work. They understand and value things like sharing, being nice, etc. Our educators stress that media-making is a team process and that the more people there are to help, the better the video/animation/whatever will be. Also, it helps that during production, everyone has a job to do, and everyone understand how their jobs fit together: there's someone in front of the camera, someone behind the camera, someone holding the boom pole, etc. This gives them the experience to ground concepts like "sharing" and "team work" in a context that is both fun and productive.

While a competitive model is the most familiar to these students, her statement reflects that all hope is not lost when trying to expose students to dynamic framed experiential learning, a learning that encompasses an array of collaborative creation, thinking, and value of self abilities and the abilities of others. Programs as such, while they are not perfect in their approach, use media making and visual arts as a way to build character within their students. While standardized testing steals this experience from students as well as teaches them to be solely worried about themselves and their success, afterschool programs as such attempt to fill the gaps that CCSS does not fill.

Summary

The CCSS, as seen above impacts the administration of ZDT in a variety of ways:

1. It sets up an indirect rivalry between different organizations with similar goals due to funding pressures

2. It puts teachers in a difficult position and causes them to juggle pleasing both the state and their students

3. It provides structure in the creation of collaborative curricula.

While these organizations can not help what mentalities about learning and CCSS the students bring into their program, they can and have been trying their very best to inspire the creativity that seems to be hindered by the CCSS in students. Things like "sharing and being nice" are not merely future corporate America skills, but these are character attributes that make the world a more cohesive place to live in.

Conclusions And Implications

Creativity is crucial for students to possess within visual art experiential learning programs in order for them to learn, think, and grow to the best of their ability. The freedom to be themselves and to be accepted for being themselves is also very important when in a space where innovation and versatility is promoted. What kills creativity is fear. Student fear of being traditionally assessed and afterschool teachers' fears of fostering performance anxiety in a creative environment through the utilization of traditional means of assessment explain both the camouflaging of common core lingo and the performance anxiety that many students bring into visual arts after school programming. Somehow students' fear of being assessed is synonymous to the feeling of being judged, scrutinized, or even deemed inadequate. The impact of standardized testing through the common core in afterschool programs has implications for the larger issue of the achievement gap and poor testing scores in institutions that are mainly comprised of black and brown students. The implications are that inadequate retention of information may not be what makes or breaks students on standardized tests, yet the influence of the environment that students reside in will make or break the student when it comes to being assessed. Environment can represent various facets of their life such as home, neighborhood, and school. (Brady, 2012) The pressure to perform is, in some students' minds, coupled with the pressure to excel perfectly, which is a pressure that is hard for young students to carry. Because the school system has established such a highly stressful, cutthroat, and competitive environment for students in the traditional classroom, where anything they answer can be used against them or count against them, students may fear the risk of being "wrong." The implications for how this pertains to the achievement gap is that pressure hinders performance and as long as students are pressured and potentially scrutinized, any materials associated with this feeling of pressure and assessment can trigger anxiety and thus affects their performance. In addition, after school

teachers in this particular organization are faced with the task of as Kraft & Sakofs (1998) state: actively engaging students through experiential learning that will have real consequences in their life as well as camouflaging CCSS and its connotation with testing so as to not incite this anxiety and performance hindrance in students, which in turn says something about the negative impact that CCSS has on students in school as well as how CCSS is somewhat at war with who these students are as creative beings (Brady, 2012).

In regards to competition, it is quite interesting to see the effects CCSS has both directly on students and indirectly on non- profit organizations. Students in their day-to-day experience with traditional schooling witness competition daily as they receive grades and are ranked in comparison to other students. Because of the competitive atmosphere of traditional schooling and the goal of the common core to create highly competent students who will be able to compete amongst other well qualified students, students possessed that mentality in seemingly less stressful and pressure filled environments like afterschool to compete with one another and compare their work to others' work. (Alger, 2014) While after school visual arts programs as the one I've so closely studied work to foster togetherness in the classroom through tasks that require collaboration, the CCSS effects on students are very evident. While I have observed students working together to accomplish a task and noticed that CCSS has somewhat helped to outline for students and teachers what that looks like, The need to finish first and one up a peer rather than wait for a fellow peer cannot be overlooked. CCSS also indirectly creates this competition between non-profit organizations serving students in local communities. Because CCSS is the most relevant method by which students learn, grants seeking to fund after school programs are in search of programs that can align themselves to CCSS. As result, programs are forced to compete to appear more fundable.

In conclusion, though there is still much study to be done in the case of common core's effects on after school programming, we know in fact that CCSS has an effect. Although it provides structure to afterschool programs as well as opportunities for teachers to plan lessons efficiently, It's negative impact on student performance anxiety, collaboration, and creativity is not to be overlooked. How can we provide students with a break from traditional schooling, camouflage testing as fun, fulfill our obligations to the state, yet at the same time maintain our integrity to the students we serve and not bribe them? These are difficult questions to answer.

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