

Articles on “THE COMMON-CORE BACKLASH” (as of 20 Nov 2013, Education Week)

Is the Common Core Becoming a Fiasco? (Living in Dialogue) - and below

Arne Duncan's 'White, Suburban Mom' Remark (Politics K-12)

Catholic Scholars Urge Bishops to Oppose Common Core (Curriculum Matters)

Common Core Faces Kentucky Legal Challenge, Questions About 'Rebranding' (State EdWatch)

Common-Core Standards: Ten Colossal Errors (Living in Dialogue) - and NISMEC 20 Nov 2013

Oregon Moms Upset With Common Core Opt to Teach Math At Home - (K-12 Parents and the Public)

COMMON-CORE TESTS: A ROUNDUP

Transition to Online Testing Sparks Concerns (Education Week)

Study Weighs Cost Landscape Facing Common-Core Tests (Education Week)

Two-Year Transition to Common-Core Tests Approved in Massachusetts (State EdWatch)

Montana Wins Federal Waiver for Testing Flexibility (Curriculum Matters)

New York State PTA Calls For Yearlong Delay on Common-Core Testing (K-12 Parents and the Public)

PARCC Field Tests to Lack Some Accommodations (Education Week)

Is the Common Core Becoming a Fiasco?

By Anthony Cody, Education Week, November 19, 2013 8:18 AM

After listening to one of my favorite episodes of This American Life, devoted to the concept of fiasco, I am wondering if perhaps what we have with high stakes testing and the Common Core project is a fiasco on a grand scale.

To begin, let's review the core elements of a fiasco, according to This American Life host Ira Glass.

The fiasco begins with a grand idea, planned with a bold vision. People set their sights on a goal beyond any they have ever achieved before. They look at failed efforts of the past, attempted by lesser beings, and decide that nobody before was as smart or capable, or felt the urgency they possess. The fiasco thus begins with high hopes and bold projections. But things do not go as planned.

The first story in the Fiasco episode tells the story of an ill-fated production of Peter Pan. On this occasion, an amateur production goes awry when those operating the wired flying apparatus are unable to control the actors, who careen wildly about, crashing into the set. The audience, at first breathless and sympathetic, begins to realize this is no ordinary performance, and loses their ability to suspend their disbelief.

The Common Core project has begun to exhibit some similarities to this theatrical fiasco. Just as with Peter Pan, someone is pulling on wires meant to be invisible. Just as with Peter Pan, where we are told Tinkerbell will only fly if we believe, we are told the Common Core's success depends on our willingness to believe in its potential for good. But just as the audience at the disastrous Peter Pan show began to lose their ability to believe, teachers, parents and students are losing faith in the Common Core.

Here are the things we are having trouble believing:

- ◆ Educators were involved in writing, reviewing and modifying the standards. (in spite of evidence that this involvement was minimal and largely symbolic).
- ◆ This was a "states-led" project, in spite of the extensive role of the Gates Foundation in funding the development and promotion of the Common Core, and the strong role of the Department of Education in coercing states to adopt.
- ◆ Giving students more difficult tests, and moving concepts down to lower grades, will better prepare everyone for college and career, though there is no evidence that this sort of standards-based reform will redress the opportunity gap.

- ◆ Students who make it through this gauntlet of exams will be better prepared for their future, and middle class jobs will materialize for them.
- ◆ The Common Core is entirely different from No Child Left Behind, another fiasco that has yet to end.
- ◆ Common Core tests, unlike previous tests, will measure critical thinking, even though it appears they will continue to be primarily composed of multiple choice questions.
- ◆ The Common Core is a set of standards, and they can be implemented well. The curriculum and tests are something completely different.
- ◆ The organizations and individuals speaking out in defense of the Common Core are doing so out of deep convictions, and not because they have received grants from the Gates Foundation or other corporate entities. (and this is NOT to say that everyone who speaks in favor of the Common Core has been bought off. However, if an organization is paid to promote something, that affects the credibility of their endorsement.)

This disbelief is spreading out in ripples from the places like New York where the Common Core and associated tests have been implemented. It remains an open question whether our elected and appointed officials have any capacity to respond, as people vocalize their objections.

It is said that democracies depend on the consent of the governed. The Common Core creators thought they would approach this consent in a sort of reverse way. Rather than share the standards widely, get feedback and input, and generate consensus by involving the key people (educators, parents and students), they went at it the other way around. They came up with the standards, induced and coerced two officials in each state to adopt them, then they have attempted to buy consensus, by providing grants and funding streams available to professional organizations, unions and political leaders willing to support them. The Gates Foundation has spent \$191 million on developing and promoting the standards so far, and shows no sign of slowing the pace.

But the real fiasco begins when people lose faith in the wisdom of the project. We are seeing the beginnings of a democratic rebellion on the part of the constituencies affected by the Common Core. Parents in New York are seeing the effects firsthand, and are raising hell.

Teachers and parents have a hard time disbelieving those in charge. It takes a lot for us to start shouting that Tinkerbell is a fraud. What it really takes is for us to see that the Common Core, instead of helping students, is causing them harm. That is what parents and teachers are witnessing in New York. They are seeing entire classrooms of children crying after taking a test. They are seeing what they have begun to describe as "*Common Core Syndrome*," the phenomena of students so stressed out by the constant pressure to prepare for tests, that they come to hate school. And teachers feel powerless, because their jobs depend on the test scores.

Once this faith begins to erode, there can be a cascade effect. Parents who start to investigate for themselves discover the gaps in the information they are being fed. They start to see the money trails leading back to the Gates Foundation and other corporate sponsors of the Common Core. They see the violations of the spirit, if not letter of the law, by the Department of Education. They see the wires holding Peter Pan aloft.

Believing that Tinkerbell and Peter Pan can fly is a harmless exercise in fantasy. Believing that Common Core will prepare all our students for college and career is proving to be quite traumatic for those in states like New York that are on the leading edge - especially when more than two thirds of students fail the tests. Making the leap to disbelief creates dissonance on a whole new level, as it requires us to take on a great responsibility for the future of our schools - rather than leaving that responsibility in the hands of those in charge.

But that is the seed of hope inherent in a fiasco. In the ashes of the unredeemed failure of No Child Left Behind and the Common Core, we can begin a true educational renaissance, when educators, students and parents in communities around the country recognize that if they do not want the Gates Foundation

or the Department of Education making decisions for them, then we have a big challenge ahead. Rejecting Common Core is just the first step. That rejection sets the stage for the creative discussion that the framers of the Common Core skipped over. And rather than doing it in secret, it ought to be an inclusive, democratic process. We have not had such a process in a while, so it may take some practice to remember how such things work. But that seems like a much more exciting and open-ended adventure than the Common Core fiasco is turning out to be. Cut the wires. Bring education back to earth. We may not fly like Peter Pan, but at least we can move without being jerked around on wires.

What do you think? Is Common Core beginning to exhibit signs of becoming a fiasco? Can we create a new process from the ashes of this debacle? Continue the dialogue with Anthony on Twitter.