

4. Does the Common Core have a philosophical bias?

The philosophy of any educational program can manifest itself in either its overall construct or the details of the curriculum—sometimes both. The most important features of the philosophy of the Common Core are revealed by observing its fundamental orientation rather than parsing the details of mathematics and language learning objectives.

Professor Charles Glenn of Boston University writes with keen insight into the goals of centralized education schemes:

How can the pluralism that we claim to value, the liberty that we prize, be reconciled with a “state pedagogy” designed to serve state purposes? Is there not wisdom in John Stuart Mill’s remark that “all that has been said of the importance of individuality of character, and diversity of opinions and modes of conduct, involves, as of the same unspeakable importance diversity of education. A general state education is a mere contrivance for molding people to be exactly like one another . . . in proportion as it is efficient and successful, it establishes a despotism over the mind.”¹

Three threads of philosophy weave through the Common Core—statism, moral relativism, and progressivism, which are revealed both by what is proclaimed and what is omitted. The statist goals of the Common Core are implicit in the lockstep uniformity that is the central thesis of the program. All children in all states will learn the same content in the same manner so that the children may become useful workers. Traditionally, education has been premised on the notion that all education of value is designed to know truth that only can be fully known in God. The omission of the pursuit of truth as a core goal of the Common Core demonstrates its alliance with the dominant philosophy of modern education that there are neither absolute truths nor absolute values. Finally, we see progressivism in the view that all that is new is inherently superior to that which comes from prior generations of human knowledge.

The obvious influence of progressivism and relativism in the structure and goals of the Common Core reveals a view of education that is contrary to the desires of parents and educators who have chosen to pursue homeschooling, private schooling, and other forms of educational choice.

The story of progressivism in education begins with John Dewey. His influence over American educators surged in the 1960s and 1970s, and similarities between Dewey’s progressivism and the Common Core prove that Dewey’s thought still penetrates American educational philosophy. For example, Dewey advocated “schoolhouse experimentation,” meaning that educators should

¹ Charles Leslie Glenn, Jr., *The Myth of the Common School* (Oakland: ICS Press, 2002), 12.

continually reject old methods in favor of new ones.² The Common Core is this kind of schoolhouse experimentation.

“[The standards] are being imposed on the children of this nation despite the fact that no one has any idea how they will affect students, teachers, or schools,” liberal historian Diane Ravitch warns. “We are a nation of guinea pigs.”³

Dewey also argued for standardized curriculum to prevent one student from becoming superior to others and to train all students “for leadership as well as obedience.”⁴ Dewey envisioned a workforce filled with people of “politically and socially correct attitudes” who would respond to orders without question.⁵ Workforce readiness is the goal of the Common Core, and Dewey would have applauded the replacement of man “with something more convenient to social planners, more manageable,” as Dr. Anthony Esolen of Providence College described it.⁶

Relativism’s influence is evident in the Common Core’s open-ended, research-based assessment questions and expansive new data systems. In the late 1900s, Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences injected relativism into the philosophy of education.⁷ Contending that children have different cognitive strengths and styles, Gardner echoed Dewey’s assertions that children’s differing experiences eliminate objectively right answers.⁸ Gardner further argued that it is “unfair” to expect all children to answer the same question in the same way. He called on educators to reject standardized tests designed to measure proficiency according to “logic and mathematics” and substitute assessments that elicit the differences between children’s intelligences.⁹

Since the Common Core was first announced, the government’s rhetoric has been dominated by the jargon of “assessments” instead of “standardized tests.” The new requirement of using open-ended questions on standardized assessments is a direct result of Gardner’s relativism.¹⁰ Gardner also argued for comprehensively tracking student performance so that methods of instruction can be adjusted and students can be matched with jobs suited to their intellectual tendencies.¹¹ The

² Henry T. Edmonson, III, *John Dewey and the Decline of American Education* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2006), 28–29.

³ Diane Ravitch, “Why I Oppose the Common Core Standards,” *Washington Post*, February 26, 2013, accessed June 12, 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/wp/2013/02/26/why-i-oppose-common-core-standards-ravitch/>.

⁴ Edmonson, *John Dewey*, 67.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶ Anthony Esolen, *Ten Ways to the Destroy the Imagination of Your Child* (Wilmington: ISI Books, 2010), 237.

⁷ See Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

⁸ Edmondson, 39.

⁹ See Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences*, 72, 169–170.

¹⁰ Arne Duncan, “Beyond the Bubble Tests: The Next Generation of Assessments,” Department of Education, September 2, 2010, accessed June 11, 2013, <http://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/beyond-bubble-tests-next-generation-assessments-secretary-arne-duncans-remarks-state-1>.

¹¹ Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences*, 10, 72.

Department of Education's emphasis on enlarging data systems and replacing teacher-student interaction with advanced computer-assisted learning stems from Gardner's philosophy.

The progressive and relativistic idea that the purpose of education is merely for all students to study a specific set of material, show growth by typing narrative answers on assessments, and grow up to be productive members of the workforce must be refuted. Progressivism and relativism serve as the means of achieving the goal of a citizenry with a statist orientation.

America rose to greatness when education was utterly decentralized and widely considered to be beyond the competence of government. One might reasonably wonder why educational planners do not consider a return to that which has proven successful in the past rather than pursue a trend of their own making. This is especially inexplicable in light of the contemporary success of the homeschooling movement, which is both entirely individualistic and dominated by more traditional approaches to educational goals and content.

The philosophy of the Common Core is not revealed in the individual standards. Many forms of education would result in the acquisition of similar individual items of knowledge and skill. The philosophy that is antithetical to many is revealed in the broad purposes and the coercive uniformity of the Common Core.