

Recent Changes to the US Education System

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Introduction

Over the last few years, there has been a nationwide initiative by the American Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the National Governors' Association Centre for Best Practices (NGA Centre). The aim has been to introduce Common Core State Standards for mathematics and English language arts and literacy.

Quotations in italics throughout the article below are taken from the Core Standards website at <http://www.corestandards.org/>

What are the common core standards?

The Common Core is a set of high-quality academic standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy (ELA). These learning goals outline what a student should know and be able to do at the end of each grade. The standards were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live.

Who developed them and why?

The standards were drafted by experts and teachers from across the country and are designed to ensure students are prepared for today's entry-level careers, freshman-level college courses, and workforce training programs. The Common Core focuses on developing the critical-thinking, problem-solving, and analytical skills students will need to be successful.

The website states that

"for years, the academic progress of our nation's students has been stagnant, and we have lost ground to our international peers."

and that progress in the USA has been affected by

"an uneven patchwork of academic standards that vary from state to state and do not agree on what students should know and be able to do at each grade level."

[<http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/>]

Different sections of the website give further, more detailed information.

Where have they been adopted?

To date (June 2015), forty-three states, the District of Columbia, four territories, and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) have voluntarily adopted and are moving forward with the Common Core. [<http://www.corestandards.org/about-the-standards/>]

Many states adopted the standards as early as July 2010, with full implementation intended by the 2013 to 2014 academic year. The standards have not been adopted in Texas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Indiana or Virginia, and are only partially adopted in Minnesota. There is a link to each state for further information. There is a page for each state, which may be found by visiting <http://www.corestandards.org/standards-in-your-state/>

Key shifts in English Language Arts

[references taken from <http://www.corestandards.org/other-resources/key-shifts-in-english-language-arts/>]

Full details of requirements for each grade are at <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>

A key feature of the standards is the commitment to improve literacy in history, social studies, science and technical subjects.

The information about key shifts, quoted below, is taken from <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>

The standards can be downloaded in full from this page.

- *The standards call for a staircase of increasing complexity so that all students are ready for the demands of college- and career-level reading no later than the end of high school.*
- *[There is] a focus on academic vocabulary.*
- *[The standards] intentionally do not include a required reading list. Instead, they include numerous sample texts.*
- *The standards appropriately defer the majority of decisions about what and how to teach to states, districts, schools, and teachers.*
- *The reading standards focus on students' ability to read carefully and grasp information, arguments, ideas, and details based on evidence in the text. Students should be able to answer a range of text-dependent questions, whose answers require inferences based on careful attention to the text.*
- *Though the standards still expect narrative writing throughout the grades, they also expect a command of sequence and detail that are essential for effective argumentative and informative writing. The standards' focus on evidence-based writing along with the ability to inform and persuade is a significant shift from current practice.*
- *In K-5, fulfilling the standards requires a 50-50 balance between informational and literary reading. Informational reading includes content-rich non-fiction in history/social studies, sciences, technical studies, and the arts. The K-5 standards strongly recommend that texts—both within and across grades—be selected to support students in systematically developing knowledge about the world.*
- *Also in grades 6-12, the standards for literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects ensure that students can independently build knowledge in these disciplines through reading and writing.*

An overview of developments expected at each grade

English Language Arts Appendix B contains a long list of sample texts and tasks for each grade level. This may be found at http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf

[The full title is *Common core state standards for English language arts & literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects.*]

Below is a summary of the overall development and increasing complexity of reading and analytical skills required as the students progress through the grades.

K- Grade 3

Stories, poetry, read aloud stories and poetry, sample performance tasks for the above, informational texts, informational texts, sample performance task for informational tests.

Grades 4-5

As above, without read aloud texts.

Grades 6-8

As grades 4-5, with the addition of drama texts. At this stage, the non-fiction texts are split between the following categories: English Language Arts (ELA), history and social sciences (HSS) and science /math/technical (SciMaTech).

Here is an example of an HSS task for this grade level:

*Students construct a holistic picture of the history of Manhattan by comparing and contrasting the information gained from Donald Mackay's *The Building of Manhattan* with the multimedia sources available on the "Manhattan on the Web" portal hosted by the New York Public Library <http://legacy.www.nypl.org/branch/manhattan/index2.cfm?Trg=1&d1=865> [RST.6–8.9]*

Grades 9-10

As above

Grades 11-CCR (College Credit Recommendations)

As above

Here is an example of a SciMaTech task for this level:

Students analyze the concept of mass based on their close reading of Gordon Kane's "The Mysteries of Mass" and cite specific textual evidence from the text to answer the question of why elementary particles have mass at all. Students explain important distinctions the author makes regarding the Higgs field and the Higgs boson and their relationship to the concept of mass. [RST.11–12.1]

English Language Arts Appendix C provides examples of different styles of writing, based on the distinction between ELA, HSS and Sci Ma Tech, for every grade. With every example there is detailed annotation, demonstrating the extent to which each student's text has met the core standards for the relevant level.

Appendices B and C are very useful resources both for language arts teachers and for other teachers or tutors in our MK schools. Often our teachers are dealing with a subject area outside of their area of expertise, and some are entirely new to teaching. The appendices are also very helpful for enabling non-Americans teaching in an American school, to understand more about the American education system and the way that it is expected to operate.

Key shifts in Mathematics

The key shifts for mathematics can be found at <http://www.corestandards.org/Math/>

The entire standards for mathematics may be downloaded from this page.

The three main principles are:

- greater focus on fewer topics
- coherence: linking topics and thinking across grades
- rigor: pursue conceptual understanding, procedural skills and fluency, and application with equal intensity

Overview of topics

- In grades K–2: Concepts, skills, and problem solving related to addition and subtraction
- In grades 3–5: Concepts, skills, and problem solving related to multiplication and division of whole numbers and fractions
- In grade 6: Ratios and proportional relationships, and early algebraic expressions and equations
- In grade 7: Ratios and proportional relationships, and arithmetic of rational numbers
- In grade 8: Linear algebra and linear functions

Appendix A explains the difference between the traditional pathway of High School Math and the integrated pathway adopted by many countries outside the US. An overview is given of each system as well as an overview of an accelerated version of each system.

Below is a summary of four model course pathways, taken from the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics Appendix A:

Designing High School Mathematics Courses based on the Common Core State Standards found at the following link:

http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_Mathematics_Appendix_A.pdf

Four model course pathways are included:

1. Traditional

An approach typically seen in the U.S. that consists of two algebra courses and a geometry course, with some data, probability and statistics included in each course.

2. Integrated

An approach typically seen internationally that consists of a sequence of three courses, each of which includes number, algebra, geometry, probability and statistics.

3. Compacted traditional

A “compacted” version of the traditional pathway where no content is omitted, in which students would complete the content of 7th grade, 8th grade, and the High School Algebra I course in grades 7 (Compacted 7th Grade) and 8 (8th Grade Algebra I), which will enable them to reach Calculus or other college level courses by their senior year. While the K-7 CCSS effectively prepare students for algebra in 8th grade, some standards from 8th grade have been placed in the Accelerated 7th Grade course to make the 8th Grade Algebra I course more manageable.

4. Compacted Integrated

A “compacted” version of the Integrated pathway where no content is omitted, in which students would complete the content of 7th grade, 8th grade, and the Mathematics I course in grades 7 (Compacted 7th Grade) and 8 (8th Grade Mathematics I), which will enable them to reach Calculus or other college level courses by their senior year. While the K-7 CCSS effectively prepare students for algebra in 8th grade, some standards from 8th grade have been placed in the Accelerated 7th Grade course to make the 8th Grade Mathematics I course more manageable.

Ultimately, all of these pathways are intended to significantly increase the coherence of high school mathematics.

A helpful resource for all involved in teaching.

The following website has many short videos demonstrating good teaching practice.
<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/>

Example 1

At the following link, there is a 14 minute clip (edited) from a history lesson aimed at gifted children in grades 4-5 in a school in Memphis, Tennessee.

I recommend using this clip amongst others, for ongoing training sessions for teachers or tutors. <https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/analyzing-stakeholders-nea>

The topic of the lesson is the Great Migration: and the focus is on point of view analysis. Alongside the video, there are questions which may be discussed afterwards.

- How did Ms. Chism adjust her lesson to make sure all students had the background knowledge to complete the activity?
- What are the benefits of using accountable talk stems?
- How do students critique each other's work?

Example 2

This can be found at <https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/experiential-learning-with-science>

This shows a Grade 8 science lesson which involves the challenge of designing and making a scooter, the movement of which demonstrates Newton's Third Law. It lasts 4½ minutes and is accompanied by the following questions:

- What is the effect of learning about Newton's 3rd Law in a real-world context rather than direct instruction?
- How does Mr. Ruff create multiple opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding?
- What makes the parameters Mr. Ruff gives his students effective?

If you can teach someone the concept, the skill... instead of reading it out of a book or memorising it from your notes, then [they] know it.

[Ryan Ruff, 7th and 8th grade teacher, Heritage K-8 Charter School Escondido, CA]

Feedback

We would welcome comments and feedback on the subject of the American Core Standards. It would be especially interesting to hear of teachers who have been involved in implementing them. How do they compare to the previous situation? To what extent are they being applied in the MK schools where you are working? Please write to us with your experiences and opinions.

TCKs and Long-Term Cultural Identity

Introduction

TCKs interact significantly with two or more cultures. How does this affect the long-term cultural identity of the TCKs? Specifically, to which culture do they say they belong? Where do they *feel* they belong? To which culture do their behavior, values, and core beliefs most closely correspond in a given context? (Note that the answers to these questions may or may not all be the same.)

There are various ways in which TCKs can, intentionally or subconsciously, resolve their cultural identity. I will refer to these ways as "cultural styles", or simply "styles". This categorization was inspired primarily by three sources: an *Among Worlds* article; a classic model of conflict management styles; and a "TCK Flag".

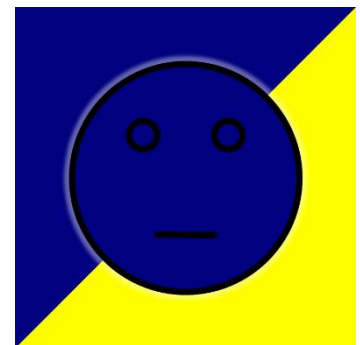
In the included diagrams, the top left symbolizes the TCK's passport culture. The bottom right symbolizes the host culture. The smiley face symbolizes the TCK and the cultural identity he/she presents when surrounded by the host culture or the passport culture. Ways of dealing with three or more cultures are analogous to ways of dealing with two. Naturally, in practice, responses are rarely as clear-cut as the styles suggest.

Cultural Styles

Bull

A bull doesn't adapt to those around it. When conflict arises, it maintains and defends its original interests. Similarly, someone using this cultural style **keeps his passport culture without modification**.

Possible reasons for adopting this style include moving away from the passport culture at a late age; struggling with the host culture, or with moving in general; a sense of cultural superiority in the parents; and limited adaptability and open-mindedness. This person may view himself or herself not as a TCK, but as a member of the passport culture who happened to spend some time growing up abroad.

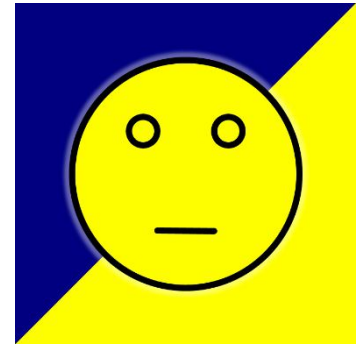


The Bull style allows the TCK to bring an outside perspective into the host culture and makes re-entry into the passport culture easy. However, this style also leads to significant conflict in the host culture and can make the TCK feel personally alienated and isolated there.

Butterfly

A butterfly started out as a caterpillar and then permanently changed into something very different. Analogously, a person who uses this style **fully adopts the host culture and gives up the passport culture**.

A person who adopts the Butterfly style may have spent a lot of time in the host culture. Alternatively, he may have fallen in love with the host culture/country because of particular cultural traits, the area's natural beauty, friendships with locals, or the parents' positive attitude toward the host culture. Given the option, this TCK may choose to remain in the host culture or to marry someone from there.

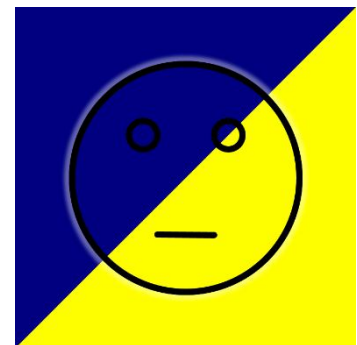


This style tends to make identification with the host culture easy (aside from differences in appearance, citizenship, bloodline, etc.). It also enables the TCK to bring an outside perspective into the passport culture, if he moves back there. Yet potential (re)entry into the passport culture (and visits to it) can be accompanied by conflicts. Also, if, due to external factors, the TCK is unable to live in the host culture as an adult, he may be unhappy and critical for many years.

Chameleon

Some species of chameleons change their colors to blend in with their surroundings. Similarly, a TCK using the Chameleon style **adopts whichever culture he/she is in at the time**.

The Chameleon might be used by a TCK who is naturally adaptable, seeks harmony, wants to quickly be accepted and make local friends, has frequently transitioned between the passport culture and the host culture, or has lived in several cultures. Note that almost all TCKs use the Chameleon to at least a limited degree. That's because, in most circumstances, changes in environment force changes in behavior. E.g., the local climate and terrain, the laws, and the availability of products and services can heavily affect what one can reasonably do.



This style prevents culture-based conflicts. It facilitates quick acceptance and development of friendships; a broader worldview; and enhanced adaptability in general. Furthermore, as someone who understands and is accepted in both cultures, a Chameleon TCK can help resolve conflicts that arise between individuals of both cultures. At the same time, the TCK may seem inconsistent or inauthentic (i.e., changing his identity or hiding part of it) to himself and to others who see both sides of him. (In reality, of course, culture is only a part of one's identity.) The depth of the TCK's friendships may also be limited, since the TCK probably avoids frequently bringing up experiences from the other culture.

Tasmanian Devil

A Tasmanian devil draws lots of attention to itself (by making noise) and may be aggressive. A Tasmanian Devil TCK **emphasizes his differences from whichever culture he is in at the time**. That is, he displays the passport culture while located in the host culture and displays the host culture while in the passport culture.

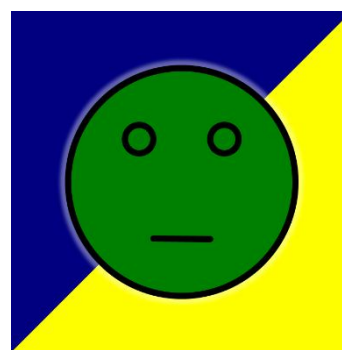


A TCK may become a Tasmanian Devil to preserve his/her individuality; avoid "betraying" the other culture; represent underrepresented perspectives; or acquire the label of "foreigner" as a disclaimer for cultural blunders. Alternatively, the TCK may simply have grown accustomed to, and comfortable with, feeling different from those around him. Or maybe the individual just finds conflict or attention stimulating. He could also be differentiating himself out of a sense of personal superiority or, conversely, to hide a feeling of inferiority.

A Tasmanian Devil TCK brings an outside perspective into each culture. Often, such a TCK is also more willing/eager to support those on the social fringe (and may even become an advocate for social justice). However, this style brings conflict and potential alienation in each culture. In addition, as with the Chameleon, the TCK may seem, to himself or to others, to be changing identities or concealing part of his identity.

Mule

A mule is a cross between a horse and a donkey, a kind of "average" of the two. A Mule TCK **evenly blends the passport culture and the host culture**. One example of using this style might be adopting the midpoint between time-orientation and event-orientation (if applicable). Another is alternately wearing clothing from each culture, or just wearing clothing common to both.

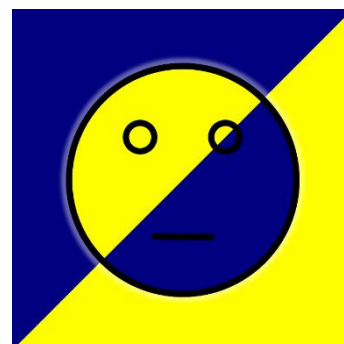


This style might be natural for a TCK who has had significant positive contact with both cultures, especially if the individual isn't inclined to adjust culturally after each relocation.

A Mule TCK has no severe cultural conflicts in either culture; brings a somewhat new perspective into each; and tends to avoid negative extremes (except those shared by both cultures). Furthermore, as a kind of "middle ground", the TCK can help promote mutual understanding and friendship between members of the two cultures. On the flipside, there are *mild* conflicts in each culture; the TCK tends to avoid the pronounced strengths that are unique to each of the cultures; and his identity may seem culturally "neutral" or "bland".

Platypus

A platypus has fur like that of a mammal and a bill like that of a duck. It uses electroreception, which is typical among fish; and it lays eggs and is venomous, which is typical among reptiles. While this combination of traits is effective for the platypus, it seems strange to many observers. A TCK who has adopted the Platypus style **consciously evaluates and selects for himself or herself characteristics of each culture**.



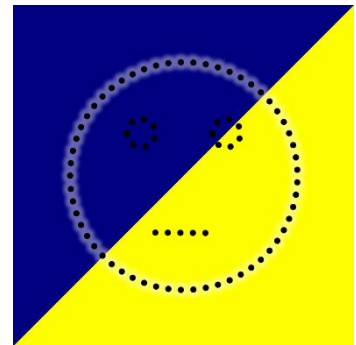
Like the Mule, the Platypus adopts a single new culture created from the original ones. However, the Platypus' new culture is NOT just an "average", a smooth blend of the original ones. Instead, the new culture may include unique, unmodified traits from each original culture. A TCK may adopt this style in an attempt to create a "better" "personal culture". Such a TCK must have developed the self-awareness and analytical skills to evaluate and select specific cultural traits. He also needs to have chosen or developed a set of values by which to decide what is "good" (see below).

This cultural style has some significant advantages. Ideally, the new "third" culture has the *best combination* of traits from the two cultures. (The Platypus' culture does not necessarily include all the *individually best traits* from the two cultures, as certain traits may not combine very well with certain other traits.) This new culture is therefore "better" (according to the TCK's set of values) than either of the original cultures. It thus truly enriches the TCK. Furthermore, the surrounding culture generally sees only the more positive traits of the other culture (passport culture or host culture) displayed in the third culture. Thus, members of the surrounding culture are enriched, can learn to appreciate the other culture, and don't have many cultural conflicts with the TCK. The main disadvantage of this style is that the TCK's culture may seem like a patchwork (i.e. not integrated) or may end up not resembling anyone else's culture.

Turtle

When conflict arises, a turtle avoids interaction with the outside world by hiding in its shell. Similarly, a Turtle TCK **avoids any significant interaction with the surrounding culture.**

This style could be exhibited by someone who is naturally shy or introverted, wants to avoid cultural (including linguistic) mistakes or conflict, or desires to preclude additional heartache from renewed bonding and separation. Or maybe somebody adopts the Turtle after thinking to himself, "I will never really fit in and belong here anyway, so why bother engaging?"



This style does preclude heartache due to renewed separation and allows the TCK to avoid conflicts and cultural mistakes. Yet it also leads to isolation/loneliness, as well as to reduced skill and confidence in performing various tasks (including speaking the local language) in each culture. Also, a Turtle TCK is limited to types of work and other activities that don't require interaction with the surrounding culture.

Conclusion

Each cultural style has advantages and disadvantages. Which style is the most helpful depends on the TCK and his situation. In practice, most TCKs use a mix of some of the above styles. Furthermore, a given TCK may switch styles repeatedly during his lifetime, e.g., due to developmental changes. Knowing about the various cultural styles can help TCKs better understand themselves and each other in the ways they adapt to cultural transitions and differences.

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