

The Importance of the C3 Framework

The C3 Framework for Social Studies State Standards will soon be released under the title The College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: State Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History. The C3 Project Director and Lead Writer was NCSS member Kathy Swan, who is associate professor of social studies education at the University of Kentucky. In an e-mail interview, Kathy responded to the following questions about the C3 Framework from Social Education.



There are already so many standards out there: what is different about these?

There are definitely a lot of standards documents floating around! From disciplinary standards to 50 different state social studies standards documents to the NCSS curriculum standards, and the Common Core Standards—it's a veritable stew of standards out there!

The C3 Framework pulls from the best of what has been done—especially in the disciplines—and presents a vision of social studies for the 21st century classroom.

The C3 Framework features the idea of disciplinary integrity—the idea that the tools, concepts, and habits of mind within civics, economics, geography, and history play a critical role in developing young people's understanding of the world around them, and help to make them college, career, *and* civic ready. Dimension 2 of the Framework lays out these tools of disciplinary literacy alongside one another.

The C3 Framework also creates a relationship within and among the disciplines by anchoring social studies in the process of inquiry. Dimensions 1, 3, and 4 envelop the disciplines in an active exploration of questions that both intrigue students and have intellectual merit. Taken together, the four Dimensions act as the Inquiry Arc, which provides the backbone to the Framework and set an intellectual quest for K-12 social studies students.



Kathy Swan

The other important feature, and some would say the most important feature, is the emphasis on civic action as a fundamental outcome of a meaningful social studies experience. In Dimension 4, the C3 Framework closes the Inquiry Arc with a section of indicators under the heading “Taking Informed Action.” We see this as the most ambitious part of the C3 Framework, and our greatest aspiration for students is that their social studies classrooms provide opportunities to learn actively about citizenship.

What do you consider the most important single contribution of C3?

I think the greatest contribution of the C3 Framework is the addition of civic readiness to the national conversation

around student preparedness for college and career. Instead of narrowing the purposes of K-12 education, the authors and contributors to the C3 Framework agreed that social studies reminds educators of this essential mission.

The C3 Framework prepares students for civic life in important ways. First, it encourages the civic act of inquiry by asking students to develop evidence-based arguments and to share their findings in a variety of modalities—including writing, oral and visual means—to diverse audiences. Threaded throughout the Framework is the notion that students will be working in collaborative environments, either individually with their teachers or with others, to develop questions, to adopt disciplinary perspectives, make claims, and formulate conclusions. And lastly, the C3 Framework makes taking informed action an essential skill that should be practiced by all social studies students in a vibrant democracy.

In what way could the implementation of this Framework change social studies education in this country?

We certainly approached the C3 Framework as an important resource to impact state social studies standards. Many states are already utilizing the document as either a companion to existing standards, as a foundation for new standards, or as a mandate to initiate a conversation about the importance of social studies in their state.

It is important to note that the writers, participants, and reviewers of the C3 Framework see this document as more than a standards document. Certainly, standards are an important step in influencing social studies policy. But the social studies educators who have worked on the C3 Framework see it as a mission statement for a robust social studies experience. In fact, there are already efforts underway to use the C3 as a foundation for teacher development initiatives and as a template for better instructional materials. We think the ideas and key tenets of the document are timeless and should be the foundation for all aspects of building strong social studies teachers and students.

The next conversations about C3 will need to be around assessments. Without thoughtful, realistic, and ambitious sets of assessments, the C3 efforts might be in vain. As a community, we need to roll up our sleeves and have the difficult but necessary conversations about building a better assessment system in social studies and this includes both classroom based and statewide assessments. By outlining the key interdisciplinary and disciplinary skills and concepts, the C3 Framework should be a starting place for talking about what exactly we want these assessments to measure and tell us about students understanding.

Ultimately, we want the C3 Framework to reverberate within the social studies community and to challenge us to work together to usher in a new era of social studies reform. But this effort is grass roots—meaning it will be up to our teachers, curriculum specialists, professional organizations, teacher educators, and policymakers to make it happen. In essence, we have to practice civic action and model that for our students.

How and why was the C3 initiative taken?

The C3 Framework began three years ago as the Common Core standards were released. There was a palpable concern among state departments of education and professional organizations that

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social studies would be further marginalized if we didn't act as a community to elevate the role of social studies in K-12 curriculum.

Initially, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) hosted a series of meetings between 23 states and 15 professional organizations. These groups worked together to create a structure for developing the C3 Framework. A team of writers with disciplinary and interdisciplinary expertise was hired in 2011, and they worked over an 18-month period to draft the C3 Framework. The writing process involved feedback loops with the states, professional organizations, and a collaborative of 50 teachers.

Once the C3 Framework took a more final form, additional voices representing K-12 educators, university faculty, state education personnel, professional organization representatives, educational publishers, and cultural organizations were asked to weigh in during a series of targeted reviews in the spring of 2013. By May 2013, over 3,000 individuals had reviewed the C3 Framework draft and found the document compelling.

The writers spent this past summer working to finalize the document and to incorporate suggestions made during the spring review. One of those suggestions was the need to include the social and behavioral sciences in the final draft. The national anthropology, psychology and sociology associations had been engaged in the early spring of 2013 and worked steadily over the late spring and summer months to produce companion documents, now featured in the appendices of the C3 Framework.

We are delighted that the C3 Framework will soon be published by the National Council for the Social Studies.

What is the connection between the C3 Framework and the Common Core Standards?

Because most of the states involved in the C3 Framework project had recently adopted the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, it was impera-

tive the Framework should seek to define disciplinary literacy for social studies. The C3 Framework builds on the foundation provided by the Common Core by elevating the purpose of literacy to be in the service of academic inquiry and civic action. We like to say “literacy for a social studies purpose,” as social studies content provides the context and inspiration for wanting to read, write, and communicate with others. The C3 Framework also expands the disciplinary context of social studies by placing civics, economics, geography and history on an equal footing and by recognizing that social studies includes the social and behavioral sciences.

In the document, we represent these ideas and connections through a series of narratives and tables that explicitly demonstrate the relationship between the C3 indicators and the Common Core anchor standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies. We intentionally use language and concepts from the Common Core to further make these connections. For example, the terms *argument* and *explanation*; *claim* and *counterclaim*; *information* and *evidence*; and *point of view* and *opinion* appear regularly in the Common Core and throughout the Dimensions of the C3 Framework.

The Framework seizes the opportunity that the Common Core has provided to define literacy in the context of social studies. Many see this as particularly important for elementary teachers who have struggled to make room for social studies instruction. The C3 is a road map for all teachers, but especially elementary teachers, for promoting meaningful literacy skill development within a social studies framework of inquiry.

What kinds of assessments are needed to support the C3 Framework?

Because of its emphasis on skills and concepts, the C3 Framework clearly lends itself to performance-based assessments that best measure students' understandings of disciplinary perspective taking,

inquiry, and civic understanding and action.

But this does not mean that we have to abandon all other types of assessments. While the C3 avoids historically divisive prescriptions of curricular content—names, dates, places, historical eras—the document recognizes that a robust and complete social studies education includes an understanding of essential content knowledge. While performance-based assessment can measure content knowledge, there are a range of assessments that do so as well.

What we do need to do as a community is ask the tough question, “How do we know what students know and can do?” If we can begin answering this question, we might be able to build a more balanced assessment approach that is valid, varied, feasible, and meaningful. The C3 Framework creates the impetus for these important conversations about our purpose and approach to social studies assessment. ●

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