**What’s the C3 Framework, and How does it Affect Your Social Studies Class?**

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In case you haven’t heard, the moment all of us social studies teachers have been curiously looking forward to–the release of national social studies content standards–has come.

Or not.

At this month’s National Council of Social Studies (NCSS) Conference, where the national standards were expected to be unveiled, social studies gurus from around the USA were instead presented with the “Vision for Career, College, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Inquiry in Social Studies State Standards” (and here is a more extensive pdf version: Vision Statement College Career and Civic Life Framework).

**Here are a few things I noticed while reading over these documents:**

**A familiar author**

An author of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is behind the C3 Framework as well — the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). According to the documents, the C3 Framework was developed in response in state requests for further clarity on what college and career preparation (a key principle in the development of the Common Core) would look like in social studies classes in particular. As you likely know, the Common Core itself only outlines the literacy skills that social studies students are expected to learn; it does not outline discipline-specific, non-literacy skills.

**Skills, not content**

The biggest shocker to me was that the C3 Framework is **not** going to lay out content.

*“The C3 Framework will focus primarily on inquiry and concepts, and will guide — not prescribe — the content necessary for a rigorous social studies program. CCSSO recognizes the critical importance of content to the disciplines within social studies and supports individual state leadership in selecting the appropriate and relevant content.”*

In other words, social studies content will be left up to individual states, and thus the politically charged hot potato of “what to teach” is effectively passed on.

**Instead, the C3 Framework will aim at:**

1. describing discipline-specific structures and tools in the areas of civics, economics, geography, and history,
2. describing the “habits of mind common in those disciplines,”
3. and defining an “inquiry arc”: “a set of interlocking and mutually supportive ideas that frame the ways students learn social studies content.”

**Adding “civic life” to the foci of college and work**

In many ways, the C3 Framework seems poised to fit nicely with the Common Core–after all, the documents will share an author organization, and the C3 Framework project was largely undertaken in response to the CCSS–and one of those ways is in its emphasis on college and career readiness (which the Common Core usually abbreviates as CCR).

But one thing I’m excited for with the C3 Framework is an additional focus on readiness for civic life. One of the greatest social studies teachers I know said recently, “The goal of social studies classes is to prepare the next generation of citizens.” He went on to tell how he expects his students to make him proud by being involved in governing the USA, whether as informed voters, mindful jurors, elected officials, or what have you.

For folks like this master teacher I’m referring to, the civic life portion of the C3 Framework will likely be useless; he has honed in on what civic engagement means through decades of pursuing its development in his students. But for the rest of us, I am hoping the C3 Framework delivers some helpful and informative work on what effective preparation for civic life looks like.

**What is the inquiry arc?**

Finally, though the C3 Framework Vision statement is not the full draft conference attendees expected, it does go into some detail about the “Inquiry Arc” mentioned earlier in this post.

**The Inquiry Arc has four dimensions:**

1. Developing Questions and Planning Investigations: “Students will develop questions at they investigate societal issues, trends, and events.”
2. Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools: “Students will analyze societal issues, trends, and events by applying concepts and tools from civics, economics, geography, and history.”
3. Gathering, Evaluating, and Using Evidence: “Students will work toward conclusions about societal issues, trends, and events by collecting evidence and evaluating its usefulness in developing causal explanations.”
4. Working Collaboratively and Communicating Conclusions: “Students will draw on knowledge and skills to work individually and collaboratively to conclude their investigations into societal issues, trends, and events.”

**Closing thoughts:**

Though the vision statement wasn’t the completed draft we were looking for, it does give a clear idea of what that draft will look like when released next spring.

Standards can be helpful devices for teachers striving for excellence alongside their students **if** used more as a suggestion and an ideal rather than a whipping stick. If used in the former sense, I believe the C3 Framework will promote excellence in social studies education as it defines the key results that we all desire social studies classes to produce: students who are prepared for the worlds of work, college, and civil life.

I’ll end with this, taken from the vision document:

*“Readiness for college, career, and civic life is as much about the experiences students have as it is about learning any particular set of content, concepts, or skills. Thus the learning environments that teachers create are critical to student success. Students will flourish to the extent that their independent and collaborative efforts are guided, supported, and honored.”*

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