A Critical Analysis of the Modern Standards Movement:
A Historical Portrayal Through Archival Review, Written Documents and Oral Testimony
from 1983 to 1995

by

Barbara O. Pilling

Submitted to the Faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

Joan L. Curcio, Co-Chair
Jim C. Fortune, Co-Chair
M. David Alexander
Stephen R. Parson
Richard G. Salmon
Marie Canny

April 13, 1999
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Education Policy, Modern Standards Movement, Virginia Standards of Learning

Copyright 1999, Barbara O. Pilling
A Critical Analysis of the Modern Standards Movement:

A Historical Portrayal through Archival Review, Written Documents and Oral Testimony from 1983 to 1995

Barbara O. Pilling

(Abstract)

This is a historical study of the modern standards movement starting in 1983 with the landmark report, *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, and concluding in 1995 with the publication of the revised *Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools* in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The study was done through a review of available archival papers, written documents, and oral testimony.

The purpose of this study was to analyze critically the modern standards movement as a context to the development and implementation of the revised *Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools*. Objectives of the study were to identify key events and key characters that impacted the standards movement and identify issues that evolved. A main focus of the study was to develop a documentary history that identified themes that linked events and showed connections between past and current events.

Phase one of the process involved data collection from appropriate literary sources and writing the history as portrayed in written documents. Phase two of the process was done through the collection of oral testimony from key informers, especially in the Virginia movement and weaving that testimony logically and chronologically into the appropriate documentary history. Phase three of the process concluded with the identification of main themes that linked events and implications for future studies.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Grateful acknowledgment is given to those who helped me successfully complete this study. It would not have been possible without their advice, support and encouragement.

To Dr. Joan Curcio who guided my path back into the doctoral program after an extended absence and coached me through the initial stages of the dissertation.

To Dr. Jim Fortune who believed in my original idea, gave valuable advice on how to frame the study and helped me design a methodology that captured the essence of what I wanted to do. Special thanks also for assuming the role of co-chair and helping me finalize the study.

To the other members of my committee, Dr. David Alexander, Dr. Richard Salmon, Dr. Marie Canny and Dr. Steven Parson for your time and effort in reviewing the study and for your advice throughout the process. Special thanks to Dr. Parson for taking the role of surrogate co-chair in Dr. Curcio’s absence and for coaching me through the final stages of the dissertation.

To the Virginia Tech Library, both in Blacksburg and the Northern Virginia Center, for an outstanding and professional job of assisting me with this study. Special thanks to Patricia Murphy of the Northern Virginia Center who went above and beyond the call of duty in finding obscure and hard to find information.

To Dr. Teressa Caldwell for her encouragement and professional advice on how to complete the process.

To Paulette Gardner and Virginia Sparger for their patience and professional assistance in helping me format and edit the study.

And lastly to my family for their love, support and encouragement.
Table of Contents

Abstract ................................................................................................................................. ii
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................. iii
Prologue ................................................................................................................................. 1
Chapter One ......................................................................................................................... 2
Rationale and Methodology for the Study ............................................................................. 2
Controversy Surrounding the Virginia Standards ................................................................. 2
General Controversy Surrounding the Standards Movement .............................................. 4
Purpose of the Study ............................................................................................................. 7
Limitations ............................................................................................................................ 8
Research Goals ..................................................................................................................... 9
Method .................................................................................................................................. 9
Scope of the History ............................................................................................................ 9
Phases of Development ....................................................................................................... 10
Data Collection through Written Documents ..................................................................... 10
Data Collection through Oral Testimony ........................................................................... 13
Data Analysis ....................................................................................................................... 16
Organization of the Study ................................................................................................. 22
Chapter Two ....................................................................................................................... 23
The Background of the Modern Standards Movement: Setting the Stage ......................... 23
Wirtz Panel Report ............................................................................................................. 23
Reasons for Establishing the Panel ................................................................................... 23
Commissioned Studies ....................................................................................................... 26
Conclusions ........................................................................................................................ 28
A Nation at Risk ................................................................................................................ 31
Formation of the National Commission on Excellence in Education .............................. 31
Connection between Bell and Gardner .................................................................................. 33
Members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education ........................................ 33
The Charter ......................................................................................................................... 35
Gathering Information ....................................................................................................... 40
Hearings .............................................................................................................................. 42
Commissioned Papers ......................................................................................................... 47
Minority Reports .................................................................................................................. 52
Final Draft of A Nation At Risk ............................................................................................ 56
Gaining Consensus .............................................................................................................. 56
Conclusions of the Commission ......................................................................................... 58
Commentary after Publication......................................................... 59
Similar Reports................................................................................. 63

Chapter Three .................................................................................. 67
The Evolution of the Modern Standards Movement: Moving From Talk To Action........ 67

National Movement ................................................................. 67
First Education Summit, 1989......................................................... 67
Influence of the Governors ....................................................... 68
Influence of Business .......................................................... 70
America 2000: An Education Strategy........................................... 72
The Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills ............... 74
National Council on Education Standards and Testing ...................... 76
Goals 2000: Educate America Act............................................. 78

Curricula Content Movements as Developed through Subject-Matter Organizations 82
Mathematics.................................................................................. 83
Science .......................................................................................... 85
English ......................................................................................... 88
Social Studies............................................................................... 90
Influence of the Federal Government........................................... 92

State Movements........................................................................... 94
State Systemic Reform Movements: A Shift in Focus and Key Players...... 95

Chapter Four .................................................................................. 98
The Virginia Experience, Part One, Background of the Virginia Modern Standards
Movement ................................................................. 98

Setting the Stage for Revision of the Standards................................. 98
Reform in Virginia in the 1980’s.................................................... 98
Commission on Excellence in Education, Link to A Nation at Risk .......... 100
Background of the Virginia Standards of Learning ......................... 102
Outcomes-Based Education (OBE)................................................ 105
Virginia’s Experience with Outcomes-Based Education..................... 106

Chapter Five .................................................................................. 116
The Virginia Experience, Part Two, Development of the Revised Standards of Learning
In Virginia ................................................................................... 116

A Four Part Process................................................................. 116
Identifying Key Players .......................................................... 118
Wide Spectrum of Participation................................................. 122
Representation from Conservative Special Interest Groups............... 125
Governor’s Commission on Champion Schools ................................ 128
Curricular Content Development............................................ 130
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronology of the Process</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Built-in Problems</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controversial Issues</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controversial Issues Change the Process</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reaction of the Business Community to Curricula Content Standards</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflections</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme One</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Two</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Three</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Four</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Five</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Six</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme Seven</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Studies</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I Table of Agency Abbreviations</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix II Chronological Order of the History of the National Standards Movement</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix III Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>