



"Bringing the Common Core to Life"
David Coleman - Founder, Student Achievement Partners
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Part 5
Questions and Answers (Part 1)

Moderator Ken Slentz:

Good morning everyone. For the question portions that we will go through today we'll use what may in fact be a bit of a clumsy format and I apologize for that but we want to generate as much interaction as possible. We will take questions from the audience. We will take questions by phone for those of you in the field. We will certainly take questions to our e-mail address that you've been sending in and I will occasionally take the advantage of the podium and ask my own question and I'm going to do that to start out with. Thank you.

Q: David, you noted something that I think that is very critical and that's we do in fact and we learned this from the last time we went through a standards movement, we do in fact have people that feel that they're doing this already. Take that individual versus someone who is in fact teaching a common core-based standards lesson and tell me what, as you walk into that room, what behavioral differences do you observe?

David Coleman:

A: What I think I'd like to do is to answer that through the showing of the letter from Birmingham Jail and then through the deep discussion of math. Let's as we're doing that work together examine the to/from, what the question used to look like and what will it look like. But I'd ask you just because we just did literacy to reflect on those five things for a moment. Number one, in an elementary classroom I'd overwhelmingly see kids reading stories today where as they'd be spending half their time in the future building knowledge through informational text. That's just a clear difference. I'd see teachers of science and history paying close attention to how much evidence and knowledge their kids could draw from a text given because a core part of their aim is that their kids gain more knowledge from the text that they are given and that's a relentless part of their instruction and attention. It would mean that writing shifts in the way I described, that students would rarely on exams or assessments be asked decontextualized prompts as they are today to demonstrate their readiness. They'd be asked to write to sources. So these are the kind of visible changes you could see.

Moderator Ken Slentz:



Let's take a question that was submitted to the website.

Audience:

Q: If time was considered in the development of the common core standards, how was it considered at the high school level for mathematics? If standards were not placed in the courses, wouldn't one need to at least create courses to gauge whether they are doable within four years?

David Coleman:

A: That's a very good question. The core standards in their development, there are actually model courses in an appendix to the standards so there was a lot of work done to experiment in design with what these standards could look like in courses. The reason that a single sequence of courses was not proposed within the standards is there is still substantial debate in this country in later grades whether a more integrated approach to later mathematics is more powerful or a more traditional approach of algebra, geometry, algebra II, etc. And rather than trying to end that debate prematurely, because the standards try as much as possible to stay silent on the means of achieving what you need to know, the high school standards present what it is you need to be able to do. But they were often, it's a very smart question, often potential course models were looked at to make sure they were indeed viable. You'll notice that some high school standards are noted with pluses for just this reason. They're at the edge of what is seen as an advanced work. So they're meant to reduce the load and allow you to get to them if possible but not with the same necessity as the ones without the crosses.

Moderator Ken Slentz:

We'll take another question from the website and then we will go to the audience here.

Audience:

Q: We see the focus on complex grade-level text and the common core standards. Is there also a philosophy within the common core that argues against the use of level text for reading or is there still a place for this approach, the example given is that in helping students to learn how to use comprehension strategies?

David Coleman:

A: I will get to this question. The question regards what is the right role of level text in comprehension strategies and reading development and when I get to the letter I think we can talk about that in context but I would give the first a couple of immediate reactions. One of the greatest threats to a wide range of students being able to read sufficiently complex text with confidence is we keep them out of the game. Far too early and far too often we reduce text complexity for these students rather than giving them the

scaffolding they need to embrace and practice that complexity. It begins as early as K-2. It would astonish you. These level readers give easier vocabulary to certain students than others, sacrificing the academic vocabulary they need to succeed in the future. So I am saying in a clear voice, the core of instruction, core classroom time becomes the shared encounter of sufficiently difficult text. The proper role for leveled material can be an intensive support for students who then need additional support in addition to their confrontation of sufficiently complex work, but remember that time might also be used for them to have more time with that sufficiently complex work. But the role of leveling where it is most useful and where it is proven to actually accelerate kids has to be in addition to their confrontation of a core set of complex text.

Moderator Ken Slentz:

I apologize. I was just reminded that I hadn't introduced myself. My name is Ken Slentz and I'm the Associate Commissioner in the Office of Curriculum Standards and Field Services and I apologize for that. Let's take a question from the audience with the understanding that if we have a question that is really a Department-directed question I would ask that you give that question to staff or submit it to the website. We'd like to be able to respond to you directly and comprehensively on those questions. So a question for David, there's been a hand in the back if we could get a microphone towards the back here. If you would stand up please; there we go.

Audience:

Q: I was wondering if you could give us a sense of the shifts in assessment that you would assume the shifts you talked about in the standards around what you think have to change in American assessment practices. Particularly, I was a former math teacher so I'm interested in math but also in literacy.

David Coleman:

A: It's a wonderful question. The question was what do these shifts in the standards imply about assessment? And I'll say a couple of things. And then just to make the math part more interesting I didn't tell you two things about math that I hope you're waiting for. One of them is you talk about focus but what gets left out, right? That's where the rubber meets the road. Where's the eraser? The pen is a lot easier than the eraser in educational circles. The second point is what does it mean for mathematics assessment? I'm going to go into that in some detail later. So I'll give you a literacy example to start with and then we'll go back to math and what it means for assessment. In literacy as I said today you have prompts for kids to write about that have no source behind them. So of course they have stronger opinions or feelings because that's all the evidence that they can draw upon. You have assessments that test narrowly English Language Arts year by year rather than the literacy assessment that the core standards demand where you demonstrate your ability not just to read literary text but equally text in



history and social studies and scientific and technical text every year as you mark your progress towards college and career readiness. So those are the kinds of shifts there but I will get back to you on math assessment.

Moderator Ken Slentz:

One last question and then we will go into the letter if you would. I will do one more question from the website similar to what you're alluding to David.

Audience:

Q: In consideration of the stairway to high school graduation, it appears that there may be some tension between college readiness and career readiness. If not, why do we continue to include both goals as if they are separate? If so, why are there not two separate paths?

David Coleman:

A: The research on this subject is actually fascinating. That is, the question here is why say college and career if they're the same or are they different, is there tension between these two goals. I want to underline the word "tension" because that will become a key word in Martin Luther King's letter from Birmingham Jail. So let's remember "tension" for a moment as an academic word that performs our discourse right now. But secondly, the data around reading is actually fascinating. There's been a study done of the text kids need for career readiness and stunningly they hover at roughly the same or higher level of difficulty than the text kids are demanded to read in their first year of college. That is, technical text is hard stuff and the snobbery that has accompanied it has no place in a reasoned view of what's really going on. It actually hovers at the same level. So we're given a gift in that teaching kids how to read sufficiently difficult text to climb that staircase gives them enormous readiness in both domains. Similarly, in mathematics that ready core I described to you, the ability to apply, understand and be fluent in that range of mathematics is precisely what pays off in a wide variety of skills. So that core, that trunk allows you the kind of flexibility that many more people can use math both in their work and in their citizenship. I think the "and" here is a celebration. The "and" is you get more than college readiness. You get career readiness, too. So I choose to see it as a celebratory gesture.