



**"Bringing the Common Core to Life"**  
**David Coleman - Founder, Student Achievement Partners**  
**Chancellors Hall - State Education Building - Albany, NY**  
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**Part 7**  
**Questions and Answers (Part 2)**

**Moderator Ken Slentz:**

It would be interesting if we surveyed everyone right now to ask if you would rather spend the rest of the time talking about the letter and picking David's mind on this because I suspect what the answer would be. I also suspect that so many of our colleagues in the field are in the process of writing up their lesson plan for Monday where they are now going to do this because David does it in such a compelling manner. Let's talk about some of the larger questions, David, and some of our friends from central Long Island ask this – and I'll go away from the letter.

**Audience:**

**Q:** I love the concept of doing less but doing it better. However, the sixth grade math curriculum is so packed; quickly mapping out the sixth grade standards will take us more than 180 days to teach these topics for understanding. Can you explain?

**David Coleman:**

That is a very reasonable and serious question. I'd like to get to it in math, so I'm going to get to in my next section, but hold me accountable to it, because I love the care you're taking in mapping out the work. I think you are precisely right that sixth grade is the most cramped. It is due to the pressure to get to linear algebra by grade 8, which forces some material downwards. That is a great pressure in terms of international competition and other achievement forces. I want to talk about an approach. When I talk about mathematics I think I can handle some of that problem, but you are very astute in finding it.

**Moderator Ken Slentz:**

Let's take a question from the audience.

**Audience:**

**Q:** We were talking before and I like the lesson you did with the questions, I do agree with that. One of the things I know the beauty of the core curriculum is the staircase that it takes to teach kids to read. One of the things they do agree is that we do read alouds and we do shared readings where the kids could acquire knowledge. But I also think the kids do need, according to research, time on text in order to be

able to learn how to read this text the way they do. One thing that I'm not hearing right now is how do we allow the kids at their own levels to be able to grow as learners and readers?

**David Coleman:**

**A:** Let me say two interesting things about this wonderful and astute question on your part. There are two levels to it. I should have said earlier there is something quite unique about the structure of the reading standards. There are if you've looked at them 10 anchor standards in reading and then you'll notice, remarkably, there are 10 standards in reading for kindergarten, first grade, second grade, third grade. This echo of the 10 standards is not due to a strange biblical fetish on the part of the authors of the standards. It is instead, the idea is that you're given years to practice these core competencies. So the first standard in every grade -- kindergarten through 12th grade -- whether dealing with informative text or literary text is read closely to determine the explicit meaning and make logical inferences based on evidence and be able to share that evidence in writing or speaking. In 5<sup>th</sup> grade that is citing evidence explicitly from the text. By 7th grade it is looking for the strongest evidence, making distinctions between weaker and stronger evidence. It's accumulating more evidence. Stronger readers actually read more. What we found by looking at the NAEP 8<sup>th</sup> grade results is that the single thing that marked those kids who got past the 8<sup>th</sup> grade wall was their command of evidence in the text. That's why that first standard in its development is so crucial. At the same time, they're working on the 10<sup>th</sup> reading standard, which is where they read gradually increasing complex text over time. This isn't a one-time hyperspace jump. This is the work of years of practice that intentionally focuses on the same core. They are reading in this way from a very young age.

Now you asked me additionally is there space for both the shared reading people are doing and the independent reading? I want to be clear about the word "independent" because the standards require independence in the sense kids have to be able do what I did with that letter on their own, meaning without the kind of prompting and questioning. They have to gain that independence to be college and career ready. But another kind of independence, "independent recreational reading," is the work they do outside at their own level. I will tell you two things about it. One thing of course it is crucial that students are doing a lot of reading outside of this kind of reading on their own and at their own level as well frankly as material that should stretch them. But I must tell you an alarming thing for those who overly bank on that independent recreational reading. We talked to the leading provider of such tools for children. Do you know what grade level student choice of text levels out at? Overwhelmingly, 90% of the selections stop at this level—5th grade. So while we must encourage that work, we must not overly rely on it as our staircase to complexity sets a balance.

**Audience:**

**Q:** When you get into the middle school ages, then one of the things that we probably should continue is that choice of freedom of valuing what you just did, which I totally value, and the choice of them choosing their own independent books to keep that staircase of learning evolving.

**David Coleman:**

**A:** I think so. I think we have to figure out in the middle level how you prompt kids during that independent recreational reading to grab sometimes harder things than they will naturally spontaneously do. But of course, I hope that the work we're doing as a classroom, allowing kids to jump into a difficult text and read it with pleasure, will be a lot like the way they read outside of class. In other words, I'm trying to create actually less of a gap between the way people read stuff they love, which is they typically don't have a question before they start, they typically get into the book themselves. The way we just read the letter is hopefully a model not only for classroom-style reading but reading you can do with what you most care about.

**Moderator Ken Slentz:**

We do have another question from the audience.

**Audience:**

**Q:** I really appreciate a lot of what you're saying. My question has more to do with when you talk about these shifts. I'm thinking more or less of the shift that has to happen almost without sounding hokey or organic but the change that has to happen with the heart because I think a lot of this, we as educators we believe in this, it's the reason why we got into teaching, but because of how education has evolved, and some of the demands, we're not always able to do that. I say this because I'm an RtI coordinator and what I am struggling with is that second order change, that true sustainability. If we really want this to work, there's going to be a whole lot of work that has to be done where people have to really be reflective about their practice, districts have to think about what they think about children, the expectations that we have for all children. I want to get your thoughts.

**David Coleman:**

**A:** I think you say something very profound. This is a change of the spirit. It's a change of what we think about kids and practice every day, of moving from a world where we're trying to protect them from the things we think that are hard, to help them embrace and encounter those things that are hard, to practice them, as an aid to them rather than an attack on them, so it is a moral and ethical move. I'll tell you what's very interesting. I think we live in a world where everyone is sick of what's going on and they're looking for someone to stop the madness. So I just met with one of the three largest publishers of K-5 educational materials. And by the end of the meeting, there was almost a very emotional like you're saying where he

said, "We've built up all this pre-reading stuff. We never let kids read everything. There's all this associated material." He wasn't proud of it. He's the publisher of it. He feels he's been forced to do it by the marketplace. The marketplace then feels forced by the standards. There's a thing that we have a chance to break out of here that I think is very exciting. The leading publisher of ELL materials for history and social studies said to me the following. He said, "We for English Language Learners publish mostly picture books and low-level text. Are you saying that's going to have to change?" And I said, "Yeah." Thank you.

**Moderator Ken Slentz:**

Let's take a question from the field, interesting question.

**Audience:**

**Q:** If you're arguing that instruction should address text holistically, then why does the language of the standards focus on discrete skills such as using context clues, making inferences, making connections, etc.? The standards seem to lend themselves to the mini-lesson approach of teaching a specific skill or strategy and applying to a text rather than reading a text in fact holistically that you just did with King's letter.

**David Coleman:**

**A:** I think that is a magnificent and fair objection. There is something we are developing to try to fix this but let me first state the opposition. It's a wonderful question; all the questions have been great. That's particularly insightful because what this person is saying is, "David, since you've given us or since the authors of the standards have given us a 1-10 kind of checklist of reading standards, it is so tempting to go through them. Now I've done Standard 2 Main Idea. Now I've done Standard 3, etc., etc." Let me tell you a couple things and then let me tell you something we're doing about it that I think will be quite helpful. First, be not confused about reading research. There is no child who's really good at main idea but really bad at character questions. This is false. Any assessment data you see that divides it by that, like if you have a practice test, someone was asking about changes to assessment, we should no longer publish these false distinctions. What really is driving comprehension is the complexity of the text and a kid who understands something can likely discover a main idea, can talk about the structure or particular words. They all congregate together overwhelmingly--that is the fact. So I'd ask you to look at Standards 2 through 9 all those ways of understanding whether a kid is understood and can gain sufficient evidence from the text. Which of those standards you use depends on the text itself. That is, Standard 9 about argument was obviously used repeatedly here in studying King's argument, but I may have spent less time on the structure of the letter though at times I alluded to it. What I mean by that is use those standards dependent on the text rather than as mini lessons of their own. There are ways of sampling the

most important standard, Standard 1, ways of demonstrating understanding and comprehension. In order to make that more clear, because I agree the flat list can be deceptive, something we're working on again with our colleagues here as well as colleagues across the nation is a visualization of the reading standards that show that depending on each text you don't have to cover every standard and it depends on the text which ones you cover best, obviously. The best questions about a text emerge from that text and you'll gradually cover the range of reading, ways of looking at text by reading several of them. We're going to try to show this in a very clear picture that I'm tempted to draw for you now but I don't have the implements to do it. But I will ask that good person who challenged me I'm offering a promissory note that I will get back to you to quote King who talked about a promissory note in another speech. We will get you that picture and make sure that picture is as widespread as possible to avoid the confusion that you described.

**Moderator Ken Slentz:**

David, in the interest of time I do want to move on, however, this question is very interesting.

**David Coleman:**

I hope it's easier.

**Moderator Ken Slentz:**

I will do my best. It comes from a library media specialist in the lower part of the state and it's very interesting.

**Audience:**

**Q:** My question is about the role of teachers of alternative subjects, such as home and careers, library and media, technology, etc. What role do we envision these teachers having in meeting these new common core standards and how will we ensure that they are in fact part of the instructional process?

**David Coleman:**

**A:** It's a wonderful question. The standards are quite explicit about including technical subjects as some of those were in the standards themselves. So please look at the standards for literacy in science and technical subjects and I think you'll find them quite relevant to your work. That is, any of you that have text worth reading whether in a library setting or in a technical setting, that spend enough time strengthening kids' ability to gain knowledge and evidence from those texts is advancing the work of these standards. If you have something that you can teach and gain knowledge from, you are part of the team.



I want to even extend this for a moment to the arts. We have often postponed until far too late the proper and essential role the arts play both in learning about the world but also building the disciplines I'm talking about. So one great thing about your New York team here – David and John and Gladys and the rest of the team here – is they've been insistent that we make the arts central in our discussion of the core from the outset rather than a later, kind of extra credit thing. And when you think about the arts for a minute you think, "Well, gosh, if there is a painting I love, do I ever look at it once and then not look at it again?" The arts understand perhaps better than English teachers have that it's only through re-reading and looking at things again that things gain value. Such is true also of producing music. The other great advantage the arts have is in the arts we can have a single score with multiple performances. So we can look how various people look and interpret the first act of King Lear and then return to the evidence within the play to look at evidence and interpretation happen before us similarly with a musical score. Rather than looking at how the arts can serve literacy, I want to think instead about the special things that the arts can do that literacy hasn't been as good at today. You might say what the art teachers can teach the rest of us.

**Moderator Ken Slentz:**

Let's talk about the mathematics.