



"Bringing the Common Core to Life"
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Part 9
Questions and Answers (Part 3)

Moderator Ken Slentz:

David, if we can, we'd like to do one more round of questions after which time I will ask the Senior Deputy to close out for us. I do have to say as far as ground rules that we do have some innovation in how the questions have come in. We have some text, but for those in the audience who are texting me directly I probably won't read that question even when it's from family members. That said, we'll take a question from the field and then we'll come back to the audience.

Audience:

Q: How do the common core address high school students who need intense supports?

David Coleman:

A: I think that all of us need to do more thinking in this country about why so many kids need intensive supports and we just have to confront this. I know everyone always asks, "What do you do with a kid who is five years behind in reading?" I think we have to ask ourselves what the heck we were doing in those earlier years and begin to get serious, that we have to focus and deliver on what matters most on the way. It is very hard when you reach high school without being able to read science sufficiently complex. It is very hard to make up all that time because you're exiled from the disciplines at the same time you're trying to gain it. So who am I talking to? I'm talking about making academic literacy the heartbeat of the middle school. I am saying the middle school must deliver kids who are academically literate, that is, they can read sufficiently difficult text in science and history and that those are thought of as equally crucial as the specific knowledge that students gain in those disciplines and that that is delivered. But it's not just blaming each other, right? It's each of us focusing on what we have to deliver most. And in the high school setting what I tell you is focus does the most for the kid, interestingly, who is ahead and those who are behind. For the kid who is behind, it allows them to dig in on a core so that it's not that they miss the whole river and mile-wide, inch-deep of math that they have to do all of it allows them to focus and interestingly and beautifully it's what the best students in mathematics do. They focus in almost scary ways to a degree on these powerful tools that they use with remarkable flexibility. But the tools within the



core are the same ones advanced students use. So, the lucky thing is that this continual work, practicing what's difficult, is the kind of work that at each stage helps you and also if you are behind most helps you.

Moderator Ken Slentz: Question from the audience.

Audience:

Q: I feel that with our President producing STEM and I agree that the arts should be in there so we can make it STEAM if we'd like, meaning that we need vowels, it is very crucial that our students are put through the entire STEAM process from elementary on. I want to know how State Ed is going to work with our teachers to provide professional development for our elementary teachers to teach all these subjects so that by the time we're looking for that literacy in the middle school and the high school it is already there. I want to know how we can do that and I'm sure all our groups here are willing to help but we would like to know how you are going to work with us.

David Coleman:

A: I will, of course, defer to the State leadership to talk about the State effort. But where I agree with you here is there is a wonderful investment to be made in knowledge in the elementary school as you put it not only in mathematics but in literacy. So that commitment to in the elementary school immediately infuse it with informational text, with knowledge about the world, at the same time that this deeper understanding of the core mathematics we're describing as part of the elementary school is at the core of this work. Beginning there does allow greater things to be done later. But that's as much as I feel is appropriate for me to say so I'll leave it to Dr. King and others to talk more about that.

Moderator Ken Slentz:

There are things, again, as I suggested that are questions that are more staff oriented and we hope that you will catch us afterwards and ask that question or that you'll write it in so that our curriculum folks can get back to you on that. We have another question. For our friends on the webinar we'd like to have the microphone with you.

Audience:

Q: My question kind of lends itself to the comment that the lady had made over there and remarks made in the beginning by the gentleman with regards to radically changing teacher preparation and her concern that we've been in this system so long. How are we going to support current educators in this incredible change? Speaking from an ELA/math/all curriculum perspective, I guide curriculum mapping in our district and I want my folks to believe that all this hard work we've done and all these curricular



conversations over the past five years were not for naught, so to speak. I'd like you to speak to the value of having the knowledge of what we're doing and how it will marry with the new common core.

David Coleman:

A: Thank you so much for that wise question which is how does this work build on what's been done before rather than just painting a picture. I'm going to tell you a funny story if it's okay. One of the most successful and surprising conversations I had in supporting the common core standards was with one of the leaders of the Southern Baptists. No one expected them to come along as enthusiastically as they did and he said to me, "What you've captured in these standards are the fundamentals of what remains the same in the 21st century as well as what changes." There is in these and I think you heard it in what happened and what you saw a return to fundamental things that experienced teachers and wonderful teachers have been doing for a very long time. In fact, it privileges some of the best work that has been done and shines a light on it in arithmetic, in reading carefully and closely. Many teachers I'm sure watching this are going, "I've been telling everyone we have to do this stuff for ages." I realize how much this is a recapturing, an archeology expedition to find some of the finest work that's been done and make it the center rather than the edge of our work. Similarly in mathematics there's been wonderful work done in this state to integrate the practices and the practices in mathematics into the understanding of specific content and you see how the core rewards that in the example I gave you. So, let me say in a clear voice, this state is ahead of the game in that it was already revising its standards to prepare for these standards. Many of the mapping work that you've been doing already has been towards that next generation of New York State standards which helped lay a foundation for these core standards. So my message to you is we do need to make a shift to deliver this instruction and we all know that but no state is in a stronger position or has done more work to date than your own.

Moderator Ken Slentz:

David, there have been a number of questions that have come in about the assessments but I think that you sufficiently addressed those and I hope that those in the field would agree with that. We have a number of people in our audience in the field from our district superintendents, superintendents, and even members of higher education. This is from one of our colleagues at SUNY and it's a bit of a nuanced question to one that came before or something that you addressed rather.

Audience:

Q: When looking at literacy instruction, the comprehension of a complex text, is consideration given to approaching an entire textbook at an even more meta-level? How to learn from different types of textbooks in different ways? How approaching a science text for evidence, for example, to support a paper is different from approaching the same text for applied problems?

David Coleman:

A: Two things about that. One is that the reason why scientists and historians so supported these standards in a wonderful way is because if you look at the literacy standards for literacy and science and literacy in history and social studies they are not reading standards that were snuck in. They don't ask a science teacher to be focused on the style of a piece or on the order of an argument. They focus on what options does an experimental result exclude or include. They require you to look at the combination of data and text which is so often numbers and text, so often a part of scientific writing. So the good news for the very smart question by the person who wrote in is that these standards in a new way pay much closer attention to the different sorts of evidence that mark these disciplines and really create a path for kids to master that not only in one classroom but throughout their work in middle school and in high school.

Moderator Ken Slentz:

Another question from the audience.

Audience:

Q: I have a question about the difference between English as a subject and literacy.

David Coleman:

A: I am hopeful by college and career ready that we can celebrate the power of that combination. So let's talk about how English Language Arts as a subject changes in the face of these standards. What we're not saying to English Language Arts teachers, to be clear, is they're meant to teach dense scientific or historical text as their own discipline. What we're demanding is that historians and science teachers do that very work. In the English classroom in 6-12, in K-5 it expands to history and science because that's one teacher of course; in 6-12 there's a balancing at the core of literature and a new form, literary nonfiction like the letter that I read to you which of course could also be studied in a history classroom. But literary nonfiction here described as well-wrought arguments and informational texts that are written to a broad audience because many of the mightiest examples of American writing as you very well know are precisely those documents. What this allows is, I don't mean here mainly narrative literary nonfiction like biography or memoir, but rather precisely these rich arguments that we went through are rich and formative pieces because it turns out that allows the English teacher to teach a much wider range of text complexity. So what you're giving the English teacher room to do is teach much wider than the story to encounter the rich range of American contribution of rhetoric and thought. Ideas are now equally part of the bread and butter of daily work as are the fictional experiences of characters. I think it's a wonderful

expansion for the English Language Arts teacher in their role and at the same time it strengthens the role of their colleagues.

Moderator Ken Slentz:

David, part of what we've talked about and what the Commissioner and our Senior Deputy will talk about with frequency is that this is in fact hard work. Let's be honest, it is hard work but it is at the end of the day the right work. And if it is the right work it has to be system-wide work and I think that's the basis for this question.

Audience:

Q: I thoroughly enjoyed the Martin Luther King example. This is rich robust teaching and learning. Here is what I am thinking. We're not seeing this in all K-12 classrooms. I then reflected on my postgraduate work in both undergraduate and graduate level courses and it didn't happen here either. It's probably still not happening. Where is higher education in this conversation? What is being provided to them to enhance their practice?

David Coleman:

A: I think no one is more fit than Dr. Steiner to figure out how to properly engage higher education in this and I will defer entirely to him on that subject. I think something quite wonderful is let me offer you a strange distinction which is between good education and bad education. That is, something worth doing, really worth doing, like reading in that careful way we did and then widening to additional sources and depth, is wonderful to do at a young age, at an older age, in a college class but we don't have to end up practice, year over year doing. And so, all I want to do is say to you please don't think you need to wait. This can be done in 5th grade or 6th grade with a kind of care. Kids can read like a detective. It is natural to them to pay urgent attention to the details and discover exactly what is happening and we can cultivate that at a very high level very early. So I think we should move to engage higher education at the same time that we do not wait. And at the same time that we begin this work now and begin the work in teacher education and perhaps take the lead in showing a power of reading that may echo beyond our sphere to theirs.

Moderator Ken Slentz:

And in response to our friends from Oneida County who posed that last question, we do want to demonstrate that higher ed is thinking about these things and thinking about them with some depth and looking even at the structural components of it. This question is from the Buffalo region in higher education.

Audience:

Q: The structures of math and ELA common core are different. ELA for example has anchor standards. In ELA documents transgrade and other numbers are used to identify grade-specific standards. In the mathematics document we have domains made up of clusters. Why the difference?

David Coleman:

A: Let me answer in two ways. First, I want to clarify something I said earlier. As you can tell I have a dangerous tendency towards mirth and making jokes that get me into trouble. I want to state to you in a very clear plain voice for everyone to be clear on that that higher ed has made a wonderful contribution because these standards were not built in the absence of them. So higher education was at the table in designing these standards to ensure that they created exactly what kids need to be college ready. You can't do that by yourself. There's a gentleman named Bob Curry here, he's a wonderful guy who works in higher education here, as well as several other New York State representatives who were recently at a meeting, where what he said to me so intelligently is he said, "The kids come to us and they can only read and write stories." That's how he summarized it. They need to be able to read a range of text and write in this range of ways. So it was a wonderful embracing of the core of the core. So I want to tell you that the people who are doing the work of educating kids in their first year and a lot of the work of higher education are strongly behind this work and that's one of the things that make it special and a chance to make an advance. So that's all joking aside.

In terms of your specific question about literacy and math, I hope I've shown the answer to that question today. In mathematics it's extremely important to focus on the domain level because you saw the domain of number and operations, etc., in early grades understanding that the key critical domains are essential to seeing the shape of that discipline so we can focus adequately on those core topics. In literacy that would be equally deceptive. That is, it is consistently about drawing increasing evidence to the text from a set of rather similar skills that get stronger and focusing on any one of those skills as the special focus in each year would actually be a mistake. We should in fact look to text to guide us here. So that's because of that fundamental difference, the recursive quality of literacy in which the same powerful skills are refined over time roughly whereas in mathematics there is a much more growth of specific topics and domains that give a shape to the discipline.

I am anxious to hear from Dr. King as well.

Moderator Ken Slentz:

Before we bring Dr. King out let me take a moment on behalf of the Commissioner and the Board of Regents certainly to thank all of you for attending today, certainly to thank the Commissioner's arms in



the field, our district superintendents, our superintendents, all of you who have taken the time to engage in what I hope you see is a critical conversation but again it is the first portion of the conversation in which we move forward to do better things for our kids in getting them ready for college and career.

At this point, Dr. King.