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# What CCSS Can Really Be

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## Secondary Desk

**Peter Thacker,  
University of  
Portland, Chair**



### What CCSS Can Really Be

Recently, I joined about 200 educators at the University of Portland for a daylong symposium sponsored by UP's newly formed Educational Leadership Network. It explored how to teach in a manner consistent with CCSS principles in English/Language Arts and Math. I was lucky enough to participate in two workshops taught by educators who understand both how teachers and students learn.

I first joined a workshop, Real World Thinking: Managing the CCSS Shifts in the 6-12 Classroom, led by Beth Elliot, a secondary literacy coach in the Gresham-Barlow School District. We began by reading a most compelling piece by Karen Tankersley (ASCD, 2007) that highlights the need for student-based inquiry. Tankersley argues that from an early age students learn that answers to questions lie outside themselves. Teachers are the arbiters of right and wrong. Students are not asked to think for themselves, then justify their reasoning. She argues that our schools value breadth over depth and suggests that in this age students need to "apply the appropriate level of sophistication to think deeply and process complex problems." We need to "create classrooms where students are willing to take risks, share their ideas and thoughts, delve deeply into issues and ideas, and take responsibility for their own learning."

So students' ideas are primary and making mistakes is helpful because we learn through trial and error. We no longer put primacy on getting things right, but rather on exploring possibilities until new solutions are found. This is a sea change in education, but one I would argue is extremely worthy and timely. Tankersley suggests that classrooms need to encourage collaboration and ask not only the teacher for corroboration of solutions, but more importantly rely on student interaction to gain understanding. This is the intended reasoning behind constructed response assessments: to teach students to come up with novel ideas and justify them as best they can.

In the second workshop, one for grades K-5 taught by Sarah Hayden, Instructional Coach in the Salem-Keizer School District and Samantha Salvitelli, Instructional Coach for Gresham-Barlow, I found a wonderful commitment to reading stories and listening to students' inferences and conclusions without teacher's interjecting their understandings of the story. When we would ask questions or prepare students for a story, one of the leaders would listen for our interjections that would lead students towards our understanding of the reading and ding a bell when we gave our opinions or guiding suggestions. This was a terrific way of reminding us that students need to process stories on their own, working with the back and forth between reader interpretation and what is in the text. I have seen my own struggling students catch each other in mis-readings of text, allowing students to explain their reasoning to one another, then self-correct. What a great method to remind students that the answers are within rather than with the teacher.

After assisting us with understanding the intention of CCSS assessments in English/Language Arts, Elliot's workshop centered on close reading in which students (and we as workshop participants were the students) would read for ideas and the arguments that backed them up. A series of sentence starters like "One thing I learned from the story/article was ...because the text said..." helped us to make claims, then find the information that backed them up.

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I know, both from my own teaching and from observing many classrooms, that teaching students how to use relevant, meaningful information from texts they are reading is an important task that often has confounded students. I believe that teaching the skills to do this work is a central aspect of deepening understanding. I was pleased to find that we are getting better at scaffolding student learning to do this.

At the same time, I just this evening witnessed a student teacher explaining that at her school the emphasis on finding evidence for arguments in reading is taking the enjoyment out of the reading when done to excess. This student reported that her cooperating teacher and she had, along with other teachers in their elementary school, decided to stop the head-long teaching to the soon-to-come CCSS assessments and to go back to teaching using a variety of methods of responding to reading to keep it stimulating and focused on the totality of the reading experience.

It is here that the intention of the testing and the reality of its implementation come into conflict. There can be no classrooms in which students independently and collaboratively explore issues and ideas when teachers are focusing solely on getting ready for constructed-response assessments. Policy makers need to address this irony: The very worthy aims of those creating the CCSS may be turning schools into assessment-crazed factory assembly lines. Smart ends, poorly constructed means. What is reading for; what creates independent learners? Let's re-start there.

## WEB NEWS

**Tim Swanson**  
**Web Master**



As lovers of literacy, we spend our lives growing the gift of reading in our students, children, and grandchildren. Reading opens up worlds of information and imagination, which is where students find their love for literacy.

Sometimes, it seems like the deck is stacked against us and we really need a breakthrough. This past week, I found two interesting breakthroughs in student engagement through using educational technology. Technology is helpful when it is seamless and empowers our students' learning. I found Sock Puppets and Educreations to fit the bill.

Sock Puppets is a 30-second multimedia presentation that is perfect for a book talk. I had my students brainstorm an anchor chart for what a 30-second book talk should include, and we created a plan sheet. I gradually released the book talk by reading a mentor text and writing a book talk together as a class. Then, I selected a few students to create the model Sock Puppet book talk. The students were so excited, they were giddy. But, it was a laser-focused type of giddy. Over the next few days, small groups of students read books, planned, and created their own 30-second Sock Puppet book talks. Here's a book talk about *While We Were Out* by Ho Baek Lee.



<http://bit.ly/sockpuppetbooktalk>

Educreations is web-based and an iPad app that is an interactive whiteboard and records the user's voice. The app is useful across content, especially in science and math. It can be used as an alternative to a paper and pencil assessment for core knowledge. In my case, I'm using Educreations for students to explain concepts that they are learning in reading groups. Using Educreations, the student or teacher can upload a background image and record a discussion while annotating the image. Here's an example that I made, comparing *Barbed Wire Baseball* by Marissa Moss with *Baseball Saved Us* by Ken Mochizuki. <http://bit.ly/educreationsbaseball>

Oregon Reading Association is passionate about empowering you to educate students in the skills and enjoyment of reading. We want you to have every advantage possible. As members, you are valued, supported, and deeply appreciated. If you want to collaborate with me on educational technology, please contact me.

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