

Truth in American Education

Common Core Shouldn't Offer Classes In Ambiguity

Posted on [December 12, 2012](#) by [Shane Vander Hart](#)

[Diane Ravitch opines](#) that David Coleman shouldn't be surprised by the confusion related to the Common Core ELA Standards guidance on how much informational text should be used compared to fiction.

The problem is that, no matter what Coleman may say, publishers and districts believe the standards call for more informational text and less literature and fiction.

That is why the only way the sniping will end is if he makes a speech at a major conference or writes an opinion piece for the New York Times—or literally revises the standards—to remove those absurd and arbitrary percentage allocations and makes clear that the point is high-quality reading of both fiction and information. And explains why both are important for the development of educated people.

I don't think a speech will cut it. [Neal McClusky wrote at CATO](#) said that he hopes the Common Core doesn't offer a class in ambiguity because they obviously don't understand the concept.

The [fastest growing hullabaloo](#) is over how much fiction versus nonfiction English teachers — or is it schools? — must teach. Many English teachers are just now learning about seeming Common Core dictates that no more than 30 to 50 percent of what they teach — depending on the grade level — be fiction. You know, Fahrenheit 451 or Animal Farm. The specific reasons for their concern are two tables in the [Common Core ELA document](#) (p. 5) that appear to lay out just such percentages. And needless to say, despite the Common Core's air of omniscience about what and how kids should learn, there is [big disagreement](#) about the relative value of fiction and nonfiction.

But hold on! Common Core crafters David Coleman — now head of the SAT-makin' College Board — and Susan Pimentel insist that's all off base. The standards are very clear, they say, that the percentages apply to all reading in

a school, not just English classes. As [they wrote in the Huffington Post](#) yesterday...

...I sure hope the Common Core doesn't have lessons on ambiguity, because I don't think the crafters grasp the concept. This explanation couldn't be much more ambiguous, stating that English classes must focus on literature "as well as" nonfiction. Sure sounds like a 70-30 or 50-50 split could be mandated under that.

This is, of course, exactly the kind of obtuse mumbo-jumbo one should expect from a document — and overall effort — that tries to simultaneously be revolutionary and innocuous. And wouldn't it have been wonderful if this sort of thing had been hashed out before states were cajoled into adopting the standards? But then there would have been public disagreements, and all the silliness of people holding different opinions is exactly what destroyed past efforts to impose uniform standards on the country.

Hash it out before states were bribed and pressured to adopt the standards... what a concept.