In this webinar, Dr. David Pearson considers the research foundations of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), especially as they pertain to comprehension. Professor Pearson begins with the research underlying the Standards themselves and then considers the research evidence for follow-up documents produced by the CCSS writers, particularly the Publishers’ Criteria. Dr. Pearson describes defensible positions for educators to take that keep policies and practices grounded in the Standards themselves and not in supplementary recommendations that did not go through the rigorous review of the Standards.

In this guide, we focus on Dr. Pearson’s attention to problems that teachers face as they work with text-dependent questions, especially in relation to the prior knowledge that students bring to the text and to sequencing challenges represented by the standards and the realities of student learning from day to day and from one academic year to another.
**Key Terms**

*Four corners of the text:* This term originally comes from the legal profession where members of the court are limited to the information within the text. Extraneous information about the topic that does not appear within a document’s four corners cannot be included in an evaluation or decision. The principal architect of the CCSS has used this term to describe the importance of using the information within a text as evidence in building an argument or understanding of content, not drawing on extraneous information about the topic.

*Schema theory:* A system of organizing and perceiving new information.

*Prior knowledge:* Knowledge on a topic that stems from previous experiences.

*Text-dependent questions:* Questions that can only be answered by referring back to the text (from http://www.achievethecore.org/ela-literacy-common-core/text-dependent-questions/).

*Kintsch’s Construction-Integration Model:* A way of describing the process readers go through in comprehending a text. Slide 17 of the webinar (10:40) provides a description of this model and is reproduced here:

---

**Kintsch’s Construction-Integration Model**

- As you read, for each unit, you
  - Construct a Textbase
  - Integrate the Text and Knowledge Base to create a Situation Model
  - Incorporate information from the Situation Model back into your knowledge base
  - Use your knowledge to nudge the world a bit.
  - Start all over again with the next bit of reading
  - C-I-C-I, anon anon

---
The Activities

**Listen and Learn**

The webinar is available for viewing on TextProject’s YouTube channel at [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LiReq1WP39s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LiReq1WP39s). You may choose to view all or only part of the webinar. Slides 5 (3:46) and 28–51 (beginning at 18:58) are suggested as a minimum. Be certain that you have a copy of the slides (available in TextProject’s online library at [http://www.textproject.org/library/presentations/research-and-the-common-core/](http://www.textproject.org/library/presentations/research-and-the-common-core/)) on which to write notes and questions.

**Purpose-Setting Questions**

- How is the view of reading comprehension within the Standards themselves similar/different than previous views of comprehension in education?

- What are the bases for Dr. Pearson’s cautions about interpretations pertaining to prior knowledge, text-dependent questions, and the four corners of the text?

**Reflect and Respond**

1. Slide 5 (3:46) from Dr. Pearson’s presentation is reproduced below. How is this definition of reading from the CCSS the same/different than prominent, existing views in reading education? How does your definition of reading fit or diverge from this definition?

---

**What they said about reading**

- Students who meet the Standards readily undertake the close, attentive, reading that is at the heart of understanding and enjoying complex works of literature. They habitually perform the critical reading necessary to pick carefully through the staggering amount of information available today in print and digitally. They actively seek the wide, deep, and thoughtful engagement with high-quality literary and informational texts that builds knowledge, enlarges experience, and broadens world views. They reflexively demonstrate the cogent reasoning and use of evidence essential to both private deliberation and responsible citizenship in a democratic republic. (CCSSO/NGA, 2010, p. 3)
2. Summarize Dr. Pearson’s view of the relationship between text-dependent questions and prior knowledge and the view held by CCSS writers (especially in the Publishers’ Criteria). In your summary, attend to the problems Dr. Pearson suggests could occur as a result of views of prior knowledge and text-dependent questions taken to an extreme.

3. Dr. Pearson acknowledges that instructional activities aimed at building or activating prior knowledge have often strayed into giving students all of the information in the text or engaging in discussions of peripheral content (e.g., funerals when discussing The Gettysburg Address). Reflect on your observations or teaching experiences. What examples of “straying” prior knowledge activities have you observed or participated in? Describe how the activities could be revised to be more relevant to the content of the texts students are reading.

4. Educators have noted that it can be relatively easy to engage students with a particular topic about which they are going to read (e.g., volcanoes, bears, dinosaurs). However, connecting this existing knowledge to the contents of a text, however, in a way that involves students in attending to how the content in the text is new or even challenges their existing knowledge is not always easy in practice. Consider a recent field experience or teaching experience in which prior knowledge was essential to understanding the text. In what ways might prior knowledge for that text be developed so that students engage with the text itself?

5. What opportunities and challenges do the recommendations of Dr. Pearson on Slide 40 (40:36) present you in your current or future teaching? How might you work with other teachers, policy-makers, and parents to address these recommendations? Dr. Pearson’s recommendations appear on the slide below:

More a body can do...

- Stay closer to the standards than to the interpretations of the standards we have seen thus far.
- Enact a full model of close reading
  - Four Resources works for me
  - Just make sure to encompass literal, interpretive, and critical reading tasks
- Pay more attention to the anchor standards than to the grade level instantiations of them.
- Why?
  - I’m not convinced that they got the sequencing right (that is the next assumption I examine).
  - What matters most is the students are traversing the full range of cognitive moves involved in text understanding.
Extend and Apply

1. David Coleman, the chief architect of the CCSS, gave a presentation at IRA 2013 which is available on TextProject’s YouTube channel at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VLba9mBFmbY. Focus particularly from 27:19 to 33:11 of Mr. Coleman’s video. Does Mr. Coleman appear to have modified his view on prior knowledge (27:19), the four corners of the text (30:22), and text-dependent questions (31:39)? If so, describe the modifications.

There are also short video clips (2–3 minutes long) in which P. David Pearson answers questions that have been asked by viewers, including further explanation on close reading (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mgcfNWGsbqQ) and on prior knowledge (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXWzRZs0EFw). Compare Dr. Pearson’s views of close reading and prior knowledge with those described by Dr. Coleman.

2. Dr. Catherine Snow, a member of the Literacy Research Panel, has written a short article entitled, “Cold Versus Warm Close Reading: Stamina and the Accumulation of Misdirection” (http://www.reading.org/general/Publications/blog/LRP/literacy-research-panel/2013/06/06/cold-versus-warm-close-reading-stamina-and-the-accumulation-of-misdirection). Compare Dr. Snow’s perspective with that of Dr. Pearson and that of the CCSS writers.

3. A topic that is not discussed extensively within the Standards is engagement—students’ willingness to participate fully with texts. Read Dr. John Guthrie’s short article, “Attaining the CCSS is Impossible—Without Engagement.” (http://www.reading.org/general/Publications/blog/LRP/literacy-research-panel/2013/04/12/attaining-the-ccss-is-impossible-without-engagement) Describe ways in which aspects of the CCSS (especially with the extensions of the Publishers’ Criteria) could have the effect of decreasing engagement in reading, as Dr. Guthrie defines it.

4. Using the list of texts below (all available for free online), write appropriate activities that will increase students’ purpose, engagement, and activation of prior knowledge, while directing their attention to the text.

**Elementary:**
- Chapter 1 of *The Secret Garden* (http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/113)
- Chapter 1 of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/19033)
- Chapter 1 of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/55)

**Secondary:**
- Learned Hand’s “I am an American Day address” (http://www.providenceforum.org/spiritoflibertyspeech)
- Chapter 1 of *Billy Budd* (http://www.bibliomania.com/0/0/36/1006/frameset.html)
- Chapter 1 of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/74)