DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 157 002 CS 004 146

AUTHOR Gordon, Edmund W.
TITLE Theories and Practice of Beginning Reading: A View from the Back of the Bus.
INSTITUTION Pittsburgh Univ., Pa. Learning Research and Development Center.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE Apr 76
CONTRACT 400-75-0049
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Conference on Theory and Practice of Beginning Reading Instruction, University of Pittsburgh, Learning Research and Development Center, April 1976; For related documents, see ED 125 315, ED 145 399 and ED 155 617-655

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$2.06 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Reading; *Compensatory Education; Conference Reports; Developmental Stages; Learning Characteristics; Primary Education; *Reading Difficulty; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Research; *Research Problems; Social Problems; State of the Art Reviews; Theories

ABSTRACT

Reactions to the papers read at the Pittsburgh conference on the theory and practice of beginning reading (April 1976) are provided in this document, with particular attention to the way that the content of those papers relates to compensatory education issues. The problem areas under which the discussion is organized are as follows: the search for adequate theories of reading and reading dysfunction, understanding reading as a developmental process, the social context of reading instruction, and individual learning characteristics. A transcript of audience discussion that followed the paper is attached. (RL)

Theories and Practice of Beginning Reading:

A View from the Back of the Bus

Edmund W. Gordon, Ed.D.
Director, Institute for Urban and Minority Education
Professor, Department of Applied Human Development

Box 75
Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York, New York 10027

This paper was presented at the conference on Theory and Practice of Beginning Reading Instruction, University of Pittsburgh, Learning Research and Development Center, April 1976.

Conferences supported by a grant to the Learning Research and Development Center from the National Institute of Education (NIE), United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, as part of NIE's Compensatory Education Study. The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of NIE, and no official endorsement should be inferred. NIE Contract #400-75-0049

I have titled my remarks, "A View from the Back of the Bus." I don't know whether I should consider myself flattered by being given the opportunity to have the last word or whether I should be protesting about being again placed at the end of the line. Nevertheless, there are some advantages to being the last speaker--at least those who disagree with me won't have a chance for rebuttal. The disadvantage is that as I sit listening, I hear many of the points I want to discuss being discussed by those who proceed me. What I will miss are the benefits of their discussions influenced by my reflections. However, you may benefit in that I may make my remarks somewhat more brief.

I have been asked to do two things. One is to present a general reaction to the several papers and discussions we have heard, and the other is to briefly discuss two additional reading programs, both of which have been developed out of a culture specific context. I will not get to that second task. The material upon which that discussion should have been based reached me at the last minute. I waded through it, but I don't really feel I can give it justice after such brief attention. Nevertheless, let me simply indicate that both of these programs, one developed by George Cureton and the other by George and Patricia Sims working with Preston Wilcox, proceed from the assumption that there are content and stylistic characteristics peculiar to the black community which, when appropriately represented in the reading materials and reading instructional practices to which black children are exposed, result in more active involvement in the learning task by these children, and ultimately in more effective learning. I don't yet have access to the evaluation data on those programs and can only report that the data have been rather enthusiastically received in some of the black communities.

A report on one of the programs, the Cureton program, did reach the newspapers two or three years ago when George Cureton and Kenneth Clark (the latter being a strong supporter of Cureton's work) were called to task for some alleged irregularities in the evaluation procedure. Cureton argues that it was a political move; I think Clark supports him on that claim. What seems to have been in dispute was whether the supplementary strategies utilized in connection with the instructional procedures were so specific to the evaluation measures as to have influenced the evaluation outcomes. Available data indicated significant gains in reading achievement associated with the use of the Cureton materials and procedures. In both of these sets of materials, the authors stress motivation, active rather than passive participation, directive structure in the learning experience, and reinforcement of appropriate involvement and responses on the part of the pupil.

It is my judgment that the assumptions underlying the development of the materials are probably too simplistic to address the broad problems in reading achievement among black children. However, I do not at all doubt that these materials can be effectively utilized in the facilitation of reading for some children. The assumptions seem sound. The materials and procedures are well conceived. The content of the material is culture sensitive. They are a welcome addition to the instructional resource pool.

Let me turn to my other assignment. There are a number of problems that have been raised by the several interesting papers we have heard. I should identify a few and share some of my biases. There are the problems that relate to the search of a theory, theories of reading, theories of instruction, theories of reading dysfunction, and theories of reading instructional dysfunction.

There are problems which relate to the understanding of reading as a developmental process, there are problems related to the social context of reading and reading instruction, and there are problems that relate to the characteristics of the persons who are learning to read.

In our search for theories, it is interesting that almost all of us has each a conception of what reading is, or what makes for reading dysfunction, or how one should go about teaching reading. This may be a reflection of the complex nature of the process itself and the complexities of the circumstances which influence it. This makes it possible for each of us to look at a piece of the process, or to look at the whole process from a particular perspective, and to come up with a slant that makes sense under certain conditions. Certainly a search for multiple theories makes more sense, given the present state of our knowledge, than looking for a single theory. We remember, of course, that theories are not necessarily facts; they are constructs which enable us to work more effectively on a problem. It is in the very nature of theories that they be tested and discarded, or tested and reformulated, or that they should become the basis for organizing the experience, the information or practice, until they are disconfirmed.

I found the stage theory advanced by Chall quite interesting and particularly useful in understanding one of the problems to which I devoted a good bit of my work. Her identification of the decoding stage, as different from the confirmation and fluency stage, and her iteration of the characteristics of the confirmation stage, permit us and her to explain a possible source of difficulty for low status children as they learn to read. It may be that the social conditions and characteristics of life for low status people in our society do not

permit the richness of literacy experiences which are essential to the confirmation of decoding skills and the development of fluency in their use.

The attention to process in Frederiksen's paper is novel for trying to understand the functional tasks of reading, but his top-down, or down-top, scheme probably is not presented in a sufficiently dialectical form. What seems to be missing is attention to the dynamic--even protean--nature of the process. The functional demands and situational characteristics of the immediate task, or even sub-task, have their influences on the process. The characteristics of one aspect of the process can influence--even determine--the direction of other aspects of the process. Reading, as any other complex process, is likely to be dialectical and interactive rather than unidirectional and non-variant.

Similarly, Venezky and Massaro's concept of orthographic regularity and its critical function at several stages of reading provides a useful reference point as we try to understand reading dysfunction in a variety of learners. In addition, as they point out, the concept provides additional rationale for phonics instruction; it is not only essential to learning to decode, but, in concert with habit formation, is a central feature of anticipation and prediction in rapid word recognition.

Additional contributions to theory appear in other papers which I shall not cite. The problem is that none of these theories is complete. Some address reading as a process, some address instruction, and some address dysfunctions in both. Not only do we need to continue this theoretical work to fill in the gaps, but we also very greatly need more synergistic formulations, building upon complementarities between the postulates. I think it was Fisher who

spoke of the synthesis of models as an alternative to the development of additional competing models. It may be beyond my own capacities to do so, but one of the outcomes of this series of conferences might well be that of generating more complete micro and macro theoretical systems from the many contributions to theory produced by our collective efforts.

Several of the papers introduce, suggest, or at least imply reading as a developmental process. Chall describes the stages through which the process passes. Lesgold and Perfetti, Sticht, and Frederiksen are among those who discuss discrete processes or process sequences involved in the development of reading proficiency. All of this is useful work. However, the neglected problem as I see it has to do with the relationship of skill to competence. What is the role of skill acquisition in the development of competence? What is the relationship of skill training to the facilitation of competence? And, maybe of even more importance, what is the relation of skill development to the functional and satisfying expression of competence?

Now, I think Beck and Block approached that issue, but they did not fully engage it. It appears that the Goodmans also were speaking to this issue. In their paper which beautifully reflects the humanistic traditions of education, they set forth an approach to teaching which, when it works, should result in learning as a joyful experience, and in my logical scheme, should result in enthusiastic expression and utilization of what is learned. Even more important, the approach from the beginning seems to be concerned with making what is learned an extension of one's self and a reflection of that which is natural to human societies. They see themselves facilitating linguistic competence without necessarily stressing skill mastery. Goodman's question to Holland was, I

believe, "Is there something about language which makes the behavioral approach particularly appropriate?" This seemed to me a rhetorical question. It was not simply an expression of Goodman's impatience with behaviorists, but was also an expression of concern that the way in which skills are developed and the excess (and even sometimes destructive baggage which accompanies that) may get in the way of the development and satisfying expression of competence.

All of us no doubt agree that we have to learn how to do things before we develop facility for doing them, and certainly before we derive joy from the expression of them. Yet, in our approach to this developmental problem, we seem to be giving very little attention to the possibility that efficient mastery training may be counterproductive to satisfying competence expression. We may be dealing with a contradictory paradox. Let me return to Goodman for a moment. It is my view that the approach to the facilitation of learning that he discusses will probably be effective for many children who come to school prepared and ready for academic reinforcement of the academic socialization process which has begun at home. Now, I don't mean to demean his work, but many of these children cannot help but learn as long as the efforts of the school are positive or at least benign. Nevertheless, we are worried about reading in part because there are too many children who are not adequately taught to read. They come disproportionately from low status families which, with a high degree of regularity, send them to school poorly prepared and lacking in readiness for traditional approaches to academic reinforcement. They need academic habilitation if mainstream academic and social competence is to be our goal for them. Now, as we try to facilitate, develop, or train for skill mastery in these children, what do we know about the relationship of such skill mastery and the

way it is developed to their ultimate achievement of competence and the satisfying expression of that competence? If we recognize reading to be a developmental process, then we must worry more about the dialectical relationship of skill mastery at one stage to the development and expression of competence at the next stage.

Another problem relating to reading as a developmental process involves the development of automaticity as an expression of skill or as the foundation for competence. Several of the authors have referred to it. It is generally treated as if it were a naturally occurring phenomenon. We have not yet determined how automaticity is developed, of what it is composed, and the fate of these component elements. I suggest that this is an important unsolved problem, not so much for those who develop automatic reading behaviors, but for understanding those who do not. We certainly cannot look at automatic behavior and determine how it develops or what remedial steps should be taken to facilitate it.

I often recall an experience that Stella Chess, a child psychiatrist who supervised my training in psychotherapy, recounted about a little girl whom she was treating who had a number of phobias associated with some physical handicaps she had. The little girl had cerebral palsy and had some residual weakness in her left arm. Stella was including among her evidence of phobic behavior the youngster's great difficulty and unwillingness to learn to do a simple task that children do--to bounce a ball and throw one's right foot over it. For some time Stella simply thought that this was another expression of this young girl's general anxieties until one day when she was on a playground watching some younger children playing, she noted that some of them were learning

how to do this task. She noted that to learn it you hold on with your left hand before starting to effect mastery with your right hand and right foot. Once the behavior was mastered in the youngster, that support was no longer necessary. What Stella realized was that in the process of learning this task, her patient, whose failure to master the task she had attributed to phobic reactions, was actually unable to master it because of the real physical handicap on her left side.

If one looked only at the terminal behavior, one missed the sub-behaviors that are apart of the developmental process. I ask, then, with respect to reading, what are the developmental micro components of a macro process we recognize as automaticity? And, what is the relationship of mastery or failure to master those micro components to the spontaneous or directed development of automaticity?

There are problems related to the social context of reading and reading instruction. Except for the paper by Shuy in which differential language systems are discussed in their relation to reading instruction and the Frederiksen paper where reference is made to possible sources of inference interference, we have given little attention to the social context of reading. As important as are our more technical analyses of the reading process, I simply must mention in passing that reading instruction, learning to read, and reading behavior all occur in situations which support, interfere, or are neutral with respect to the phenomenon. I don't have the hard data to support the observations, but as I move around the country looking at school programs, children do seem to learn to read in institutions where it is clear that they are expected to learn and where there is support to the behaviors which underlie reading

competence. In some schools reading is the thing to do; in other schools you dare not be caught dead reading. I think these situational differences are important.

One of my students, studying reading in mildly retarded subjects, has generated data which show relatively low relationships between intelligence test scores as well as scores on the Bender Gestalt Test and scores on tests of reading achievement. His data show, on the other hand, a considerably higher relationship between the degree of support in the home for reading and reading achievement. In other words, the test scores did not predict reading achievement while the home environment ratings did so quite well.

When Birch studied all of the ten-year-old children in Aberdeen, Scotland, he found a better correspondence between reading achievement and support for reading in the home than between neurologic and health conditions and reading achievement. Neurologic impairment and poor health were weaker correlates of reading dysfunction than was absence of support for schooling in the home.

Ogbu, an anthropologist out on the West Coast, reports low level involvement and achievement in reading and other academic subjects among pupils who view the post-school opportunity structure as stacked against them. Children who perceive little reward opportunity associated with mastery of the task, showed low level involvement and limited mastery.

Wilkerson reports indigenous decoding skills demonstrated in natural settings which are superior to decoding skills demonstrated in school among black youth in Harlem and Bedford Styvesant. Williams reports black children performing superior to white children when the decoding task involves a symbol system specific to the black community.

I use the reference to Anthony Wallace so often that I am really embarrassed to use it again. However, it is relevant here, so let me simply mention it. Wallace talks about the relationship between the purpose of schooling and what actually happens in schooling in different phases of societal development. He sees the purposes of schooling as involving the development of intellect, the development of morality, and the development of skill. He has described three developmental stages through which societies pass: the revolutionary phase, the conservation phase, and the reactionary phase. Priority with respect to educational purpose is assigned in relation to which phase is dominant in the society. In the revolutionary phase, highest priority is given to morality, with intellect and skill following thereafter. In the conservation phase, skill is most emphasized, followed by morality, and intellectual development is last. Wallace suggests that in societies in the reactionary phase, moral development, which by that time has become primarily concerned with the maintenance of law and order, is at the top of the list. There is some attention given to skill and relatively no attention given to intellect. What Wallace does not talk about, though, is that in any society different segments of that society are in different phases of their development so that you may have some segments of the population which are in the revolutionary phase, some in the conservation phase, and some in the reactionary phase. If you have a person in your school system now whose phase of development is different from the phase of society, and therefore the purposes for which they use the school are different from the purposes to which the society maintains the school, you have the kind of disjuncture which interferes with the nature of the involvement of the youngster in the educative process. There may be a misfit between instititutional and personal purpose

phonetic decoding processes Alan mentioned and, at the same time, use the kind of process Ken Goodman described, often within the same period of time and seemingly without apparent harm to the child.

Unlike Shirla McClain, I came here a lot more skeptical. She came expecting to get applications for practice. I am located in the kind of educational laboratory that does little basic research, but that does a lot more instructional engineering to apply tentative solutions in real settings. On the basis of reading your memos and abstracts, I felt that there would not be nearly as many applicable ideas as I have found here.

I am pleased to know that it is happening. I have been to a few conferences that have research applications as a goal, and it didn't occur. So I'd like to compliment Lauren and Phyllis on the selection of the presenters. Evidently, that has a lot to do with the success.

Now, I would like to talk about some of the things that I think I could put on a big chart on the wall and say, "Applicable," but wait a little while; wait for the outcomes of the data to see if the synthesis, that is obviously needed will be forthcoming. Thus, we can learn, pass it on to material selection committees, and use a better way of selecting reading programs for different kinds of learners.

Teachers are success oriented. There are teachers now, right through seventh grade, who do what they have always been successful in doing. No matter how many repetitions they decide children need, that's what they do for children. They have not moved from that point. And they have been rewarded in that, because of what is measured in terms of the cognitive process called comprehension is the ability to answer some questions about a paragraph. That is

relate to schools and teachers, come back to New York with me and observe the struggle there.

Let me move on to the problems related to the characteristics of those who are learning to read. The papers by Bateman, Beck and Block, by Fisher, by Frederiksen, and by Shuy are particularly relevant to the issues here. Although we must be careful to avoid the political problems involved as we group children who are handicapped by naturally occurring conditions, such as physical and mental defects, and those that are handicapped by deprived conditions, that is, social disadvantagement or opportunity denied, nonetheless, the problems are those which are associated with the characteristics and the conditions of children who are trying to learn to read. I must express my appreciation to Barbara Bateman for introducing into this discussion a concern for attribute treatment interaction. I completely agree with her that we prematurely wrote off that concept and that it is deserving of additional attention and reconceptualization. I must also call attention to Fisher's efforts at introducing idiosyncratic response tendencies into the discussion--I wish he had discussed it more--and to Holland for his discussion of behavioral analysis, particularly if he is willing to include behavior settings as phenomena of equal importance to behavior itself and equally in need of analysis. These authors are striking at what I consider to be the heart of the problems of learning dysfunction. There is no question but that learners vary along a broad continuum and in a variety of ways. Some of the variance exceeds the limits of what we call normal. Whether normal or abnormal, the relevant variance in the characteristics of schooling seems to be too narrow to accommodate the variance in our pupils. It is in the achievement of a higher degree of complementarity between learners'

functional characteristics and the resources supportive of learning and available in schools that I place my hopes for making schooling more effective.

I want to refer to the work of some of our (I call them psychoeducational optimists) and then we will go on to another issue. I refer you to Jerry Brunner who asserts that almost anything can be taught to almost anyone if the learning experience is appropriately designed. I refer to Jack Carroll and to the elaboration of his concept by Ben Bloom who assert that aptitude is a function of time spent in a set of behaviors or encounters appropriate to the task to be learned. I refer, of course, to Joe Hunt who asserts that the problem of pedagogy is the problem of the appropriate match between the characteristics of the learner and the characteristics of the learning experience. There are others, of course, but let us move on.

I don't really want to apologize for speaking from no data, but I should admit that what I say from here on is completely based on speculation. Most of the papers presented at this conference have been data based. According to our tradition, that makes them more respectable. However, it may be that this heavy emphasis on data and validation limits our work. Quantification and validation, at some stages of the generation of knowledge and understanding, may be dysfunctional. I had the experience not so long ago of sitting with a group of scholars who were trying to draw inferences from the massive review that Sheldon White did of the research and evaluation studies of early intervention in the development of children. After about three days of work, we concluded, among other things, that the problems we were confronted with were too complex to depend upon available quantitative data to inform public policy. We agreed reluctantly that the honest judgment of wise people may be a better basis. We

also agreed that too heavy a dependence on quantification may blind us to the great value of the use of clinical analysis of one or a few cases and the analytic and synergistic use of the human brain as research tools. Without detailing our argument, I simply want to suggest that in our current stage of development, a careful application of selected aspects of that knowledge to individual cases of developing readers and the context in which their reading develops and their reading instruction occurs, may prove productive of promising hypotheses which can then be subjected to validation.

I believe that the variance we find in learners, in treatments, and in situations is so great as to make individual and small scale clinical work essential. Further, I believe that the existing and traditional ways of grouping learners for study are dysfunctional. We are grouped by race, by sex, by social class, by age, by IQ, et cetera, all these status indicators which are symbolic of some functional processes which we assume to be peculiar to these groups. If we must group, why not group by the functional characteristics determined to exist and thought to be important?

Now, among these are things that we have talked about: cognitive style, rate of information processing, rate of habituation, nature of motivation, direction and strength of interest and aspiration, either presence or absence of functional operations related to reading or whatever is to be taught, or by something I call affective response tendencies. Birch, Thomas, and Chess called them aspects of temperament--all things like activity level, approach withdrawal, adaptability, intensity of reaction, and so forth. I am simply mentioning that these functional aspects of behavior may be more informative with respect to design of educational experience than the status variables that we have used to

group youngsters. Such grouping, or more important, the treatments which are applied, require not an assessment of the status, but an assessment of the function or the process, and this function or process data should have greater capacity for informing instruction than do the usual status data.

When we talk about the analysis of process, this cannot be adequately done without the concurrent analysis of the context--that is, the situation of which the behavioral process is a part. In this analysis, what the teacher does, what the class requires, what the situation permits, what the conditions support, what the climate expects, are important parts of the analysis of the way in which the individual is functioning. When a learning experience is prescribed on the basis of this kind of analysis, a contradiction between what Ken Goodman is talking about and what some of the rest of you have been expressing subsides, since some children's data will indicate that Goodman's approach to their education is appropriate. I hope that he would be willing to accept that some other children may need other approaches based upon analyzed and demonstrated need.

This conference is supported by monies allocated for a major study of compensatory education. We have not talked a great deal about that topic. Rather, we have tried to begin an examination of what we know about reading and reading instruction. Some of us have naturally focused on the children who have been served less well, but it is the problem of reading, reading dysfunction, reading instruction, and reading instructional dysfunction that we must understand before we turn to the application of that knowledge to compensatory education.

However, this concern that those problems related to the characteristics

of learners and their context of learning enable us to grasp the two concerns. I believe that the problem of equality of educational opportunity in this country is a problem which involves the nurturance of diversity and the achievement of social justice. We may be failing to educate large numbers of low status children because we have not sufficiently achieved the "match" that Joe Hunt talks about, between the functional characteristics and needs of these youngsters and the educational treatments available to them. The task imposed on nurturance by the diversity of human characteristics--in this instance, education--is the diversification of treatments. We may not yet know completely how to do that. Yet, I see the raw materials with which to work in the diversity of conceptions and strategies reflected in the excellent papers and discussions of this conference. If each of us no longer has to prove that he or she has the universal or generic treatment, but that in our collectivity we realize that we have a diversified armormentarium which now needs to be specified to the needs and characteristics of specific types of learners and to specific situations, we may have begun to move closer to the improvement of reading and to the development of social justice.

COMMENTS BY HARRIET WILLIS

RESNICK: I know Harriet Willis has been saving up some comments for us, so I would like to call on her.

WILLIS: Unfortunately, every one of my remarks is likely to be redundant, given the excellent job the discussants have done, but I think I can contribute by adding to what has been said from the perspective of a practitioner.

I have been in 30 school districts in the last three years--not 30 schools, but 30 school districts--doing different kinds of things. As a preamble to the comments I am going to make, I would like to use the Ausabelian concept of an advance organizer. I am not sure that it got into the discussion at all that there are a number of classrooms out there that have 32 to 37 kids in them with one teacher and one set of reading curriculum materials. That's the organizer for my comments. The applications of the things discussed here didn't seem to be for that kind of classroom.

For example, Lillian Harrison's presentation of what goes on in her school is not related to that kind of classroom; the kind I have seen a lot of recently. When we talk about the role of the teacher, particularly in the crowded classroom, we need to be a lot more specific concerning the "human" characteristics that Ken Goodman gave us. Some of us who work in teacher training would like to know a little bit more about how to do that with teachers.

Back to something that Jay said earlier. Fortunately, teachers are not nearly as dichotomous in the way they practice as are researchers and theorists. It seems as though the teachers, who I will describe as effective; the teachers who produce measureable effects, based on the inadequate measures, use the

phonetic decoding processes Alan mentioned and, at the same time, use the kind of process Ken Goodman described, often within the same period of time and seemingly without apparent harm to the child.

Unlike Shirla McClain, I came here a lot more skeptical. She came expecting to get applications for practice. I am located in the kind of educational laboratory that does little basic research, but that does a lot more instructional engineering to apply tentative solutions in real settings. On the basis of reading your memos and abstracts, I felt that there would not be nearly as many applicable ideas as I have found here.

I am pleased to know that it is happening. I have been to a few conferences that have research applications as a goal, and it didn't occur. So I'd like to compliment Lauren and Phyllis on the selection of the presenters. Evidently, that has a lot to do with the success.

Now, I would like to talk about some of the things that I think I could put on a big chart on the wall and say, "Applicable," but wait a little while; wait for the outcomes of the data to see if the synthesis, that is obviously needed will be forthcoming. Thus, we can learn, pass it on to material selection committees, and use a better way of selecting reading programs for different kinds of learners.

Teachers are success oriented. There are teachers now, right through seventh grade, who do what they have always been successful in doing. No matter how many repetitions they decide children need, that's what they do for children. They have not moved from that point. And they have been rewarded in that, because of what is measured in terms of the cognitive process called comprehension is the ability to answer some questions about a paragraph. That is

the thrust of most tests.

I am not sure how many people here also do teacher training, but that group probably needs to be represented, because the teacher training institutions need to get some of the messages, even about the tentative list of outcomes that can be applied.

We can probably also do a lot more with promoting listening behavior, especially for those children who are not being successful. We can include more listening activities for those children who are not being successful with reading activities, at the same time that they are attempting to acquire the set of subskills in reading.

Finally, I would like to say something that, I guess, reinforces, or at least agrees with, a number of Edmund Gordon's concerns. Some political or socio-political action certainly is necessary to see that the changes take place. Many practices you described here are not nearly as far along in the field as your research indicates.

You have moved from looking at decoding to whatever comes between that and fluent reading, but sixth-grade teachers, and I take that as a kind of a place where we ought to see that happen, have not done it nearly as much.

And finally, somebody needs to train the decision makers in the system, the administrators, the teacher trainers, the curriculum specialists, all of those people. Perhaps having Shirla here helps with that process, at least she represents that group.

HOLLAND: My comment is prompted in part by Samuels' remarks. I would predict that if you do a breakdown, you won't find those 33% evenly distributed

throughout the school system. They will be clustered within certain schools. Numerous scholars have raised an issue in this regard that is critical to the objective of these conferences; but it is a perspective that has not been included here. Many claim simply that the schools are doing exactly what the schools are suppposed to do. The schools are preparing people for their niches in a stratified society.

The role of school system in rural Mississippi is not necessarily to get its students to rise to a higher socio-economic strata. It's designed to give them the impression that they have the chance to go up the ladder, so that when they don't, they will settle in normally to their sharecropping or similar task. The schools play a role in maintaining stratification within society. Schools "succeed" very well in doing that. They are not failing in meeting the actual objective. The goals of a lot of kids, within those school districts, are quite different from the goals those school districts set. If we really are serious about doing something about getting everybody to read, that's the problem we have to deal with.

Samuels pointed out that we aleady can teach kids to read; we already have the tools to do it, and we are not doing it. I think the reason is that the primary objectiye of the schools is not literacy; the objective is to maintain social stratification.

People who should have been invited to the conference to deal with that problem are Michael Katz (a historian), Carney (a historian), Paul Lanter, and Samuel Bowles (an economist). They have all written extensively on this problem. Goodman should be invited back, I think he is addressing this problem also. I would also include Norman Balbanian, an educational technologist, who spent time in Cuba and thereby knowledgeable about how a poor underdeveloped country could

quickly end illiteracy after a socialist revolution.

SAMUELS: When I began my talk, I said there was one group that I thought might have been invited to this conference: people in organizational change. They would be able to help us bring about the kinds of changes in schools that I have been referring to. They are not reading people, but they are the kinds of people who know something about how to get successful programs in reading transferred from one location into another.

BATEMAN: I don't know whether this is true or not, but possibly if we turned the matter over to the courts, then the question of why the schools aren't teaching children to read would no longer matter. The question then would be "What is the most efficient way to enable the schools to do what the courts have mandated they must do?"

So I go back and forth between being very curious about why we refuse to teach kids to read, when, in fact, we do know how, and being very impatient with myself for being so academic about it. I tell myself, "Get on with suing the schools."

HOLLAND: Speaker requested that his comments be deleted.

HARRISON: The first day I asked Dr. Chall whether we were really interested in this reading problem, and she gave me a long dissertation about why we are here. I bought some of it, but now I, too, am wondering why we are really here, because we already have the solutions. I wonder if we just really need to get to the business of implementing them.

When I heard the first speaker, I felt very comfortable with my slides and everything else. I have a lot of work to do there. I feel that I can take a lot back with me from what Dr. Beck and others have said. She gave us a lot of things that can really be used in a classroom.

With Chall, I wonder if we need all of that decoding. I think we need some of it, and I think you saw that we use it in some of the things we do at my school. But I am more inclined to agree with Dr. Goodman on his functional aspect. I think the children need to be taught from that angle. But I differ somewhat with him, because I think we can't control the environment, so I don't say let's not do anything about it. I think we need some of what Jeanne is talking about, coupled with what Ken is talking about.

I think that we need a little help as practitioners in two very special areas. But first I think you need to get Dr. Goodman and some others to give us some models for observing, monitoring, and doing the kinds of things he believes in, coupled with what Jeanne said about the need for decoding. We need the skills, but we also need a set of guidelines a practitioner can use to decide when to do this or that or how to put it together. I don't think we addressed ourselves to this at this conference. I think we talked about the decoding on one side and the functional reading on the other side, but we never did really put them together. And this is what we need to do in the classroom.

I think it's a utopia that you are talking about, Ken, and I would like to reach that utopia.

I also see some other factors that Dr. Gordon brought out, home factors. Jay, I think you brought some of those out too. We have parents who say that because they don't see a lot of decoding in the classroom, in the ghetto, maybe

their kids are not getting what other kids have. They're thinking, "Maybe this is what we need, because we want to function like them."

On the other hand, we are saying that we need what Ken is talking about, so we need the two of them operating almost at the same time. But we need some models, some that will have been tested.

I think that Venezky might have something that can help us in this, as he develops things in his area.

I have gotten a lot out of this conference. I came here with the idea that what was happening wasn't good. I was going to try something, because I knew decoding, by itself, wasn't the answer and just functional reading wasn't it either, so I tried to put it together in my own way.

I am going back now, because I don't like the basal method, and I don't like all of what Ken is proposing, so I am going to try to come up with something that is functional and workable in my situation and, maybe, this can be a model for other areas.

Because I think we need to take a look at programs that are really getting things over to boys and girls and draw from those programs things that are good. I missed that a little bit here, and I don't know if it was by design or what.

RESNICK: Well, let me comment on that. There were many possible things to include. I thought it would probably not be useful to discuss problems of organizational dynamics--I don't know what else to call it--at the same time as we tried to discuss the details of what people do when they read and the fine grain of the pedagogy of our work.

But it was with reluctance that Phyllis and I left out some of the things you are talking about.

HARRISON: What is the application, thought? What we say can stay in this room, unless we somehow get it out of here.

RESNICK: There is some thought about the fact that it would be nice to address the issue of institutional organization, so that we don't have what I would call structural illiteracy, which I think we have in the same way that we have structural unemployment in this society. For that, we would have to get the appropriate groups of people together, and I hope it's something we can do later. It was a conscious decision not to make it part, in a scholarly way, of this set of meetings. I am glad it has come up though, and I hope it comes up over and over again, so that in the record that we leave behind, we make it clear that we do understand that those aspects are important. We won't solve the problem by doing that, but, at least, we will not go away believing that just by having made our pronouncements, we are going to change the world.

HARRISON: I wish that you and others could really come into a situation and work on the scene and develop some of your ideas. I get a feeling that when you work in your laboratory, you are really getting your own stuff together, going around and around in the same circle. Maybe if you could see things from a different angle, you would come up with something that is really good.

BLOCK: I want to address two points of concern. The first one is a difficult problem that I haven't really thought through, yet, so I will just sort of throw it out. It has to do with the nature of supporting evidence to be used for

making developers' decisions when you design a reading program or when you are designing a condition of learning for reading. We do have a knowledge base from basic and semi-applied kinds of research in the Ed. Psych. journals and some of the reading publications, but we are never quite sure the current knowledge base is relevant, or to what degree it is relevant, to our development problem. That suggests the need for some decision-oriented research, formulated directly in the context of the kinds of decisions that teachers and program developers need to make.

I haven't done any kind of survey where I could extract instructional prescriptions that might come from the more basic research and compare them to the decision points in actual instructional practice, but it seems to me that's a kind of gap that needs to be bridged.

The second point of concern is in relation to Jay's comments regarding the fact that processes change as a function of task conditions. I think that I would like to see us becoming able to move beyond that at the present time to a point where you can say that you can have one set of task conditions in which you have these kinds of processes and another set in which the processes are qualitatively different. I think the questions that need to be looked at are: Which set are optimal for which conditions, and how do you get the child to adapt this processing; how do you get him to make the decision as to how he should process something so that the outcome is appropriate to the task demands? That's where I would like to sort of see that notion moving, and perhaps it is doing that to some extent in Chuck's research with the contrasting analyses.

SAMUELS: Can you give me an example?

BLOCK: Well, I can only cite spelling. For example, you ask a child to spell a word. Now, the child has to know whether he or she can directly recall that word from his or her memory, or whether the task requires going through a more conscious kind of trial and error procedure, where the child writes the word a couple of times and then tries to recognize it. Now, how do we develop that consciousness, and that ability to make those decisions? I have noted a very simple example; things get more complex when you consider adaptation of comprehension processes. But I would like to see not only what the processes are, but when certain sets need to be done, and how the kid is able to make those decisions correctly.

RESNICK: Lillian, I feel obliged to set the record straight by saying that the last laboratory, in a pure sense, that I was in was a tenth grade chemistry laboratory, and we didn't get along well then. So classrooms are the places that I do spend a lot of time.

GORDON: Karen, that was one of the problems a group of us were trying to address when we looked at Shep's work. I think the search for a definitive research methodology may be futile. I think this is probably a point where human judgment comes in, where one looks at a variety of pieces of data, and begins to try to aggregate the inferences from those various datapools to arrive at a conclusion.

RESNICK: Well, I would like to declare this first session of the conference officially closed.

CONFERENCE CONCLUDED