THE ALBERT SHANKER INSTITUTE

From Best Research to What Works:
Background Knowledge & Reading Proficiency

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Greetings:

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Moderator:

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Featured Speakers:

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Federal News Service
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EUGENIA KEMBLE: I'm Eugenia Kemble, executive director of the Albert Shanker Institute. I'm just going to say a few words here. First of all, in the tradition of Albert Shanker, the person the Shanker Institute is named after, this organization sponsors frank discussions on important and sometimes difficult issues between researchers, political analysts, policymakers, and practitioners. It was something that Al loved to do, which those of you who knew him will remember. That is why we sponsor this forum series.

We have had many forums like this on such topics as early childhood education, school behavior, professional development, math instruction, and improving the teaching of reading, which we will pursue again today. In general, we have tried to pick topics where there seems to be a large gap between what research suggests should be done and what is really happening in policy and classroom practice. That is true of our topic today, even though much has been learned and much has been done in recent years to improve early reading instruction.

The way we decide who will present at one of these forums is by way of a very informal peer review process. We try to talk to the people that we think, and are told, are the best people in the field on a particular topic, and we ask those individuals who *they* think the best people are. This sounds like it might be easy, but it isn't. Because, of course, they all really think that they themselves are the best person. So when you ask them who's the best person, you put them in the awkward position of not being able to mention themselves. I say all that by way of telling you that the two speakers that we have here today are top rate people, who were chosen through what we think is a decent and respectable process.

Our moderator today is Nat LaCour. Nat is the secretary-treasurer of the Albert Shanker Institute, and also of the American Federation of Teachers. Nat is deeply concerned about improving the field of education, and particularly about ensuring the success of poor kids. And, I would also say, about early childhood education. Those of us who work on these issues are constantly aware of his probing and pushing.

Nat is former head of the United Teachers of New Orleans, which was founded in 1972. It was the first local to have collective bargaining in the South, where right-to-work laws generally make public sector collective bargaining illegal. He is a long-time leader of the American Federation of Teachers, having been its executive vice president before he took over as secretary-treasurer. He's also a former biology teacher and, in talking to Nat about today's forum, he made it very clear that he thought the whole issue of reading proficiency and content knowledge was key in terms of how well the kids he taught were able to handle the subject matter.

Nat?

NAT LaCOUR: Good afternoon. I trust that you have had a chance to get some food. I'm guessing that some of you have been in the classroom. So you know that

teachers have to learn to eat fast. You only get a half hour; and even if they give you an hour, it's a half hour to eat and a half hour for duty. So feel at home.

I want to welcome each of you here today. This is another in a forum series by the Albert Shanker Institute, which attempts to take us from best research to what works. In many ways, today's topic – background knowledge and reading proficiency – goes to the heart of the education reform agenda. I would contend that the issues here center around two very important propositions. First, it is the role of schools to educate children. That is, to give them the skills and knowledge that they will need to succeed in later life. And second, this role is particularly important in regard to poor students, who are the least likely to acquire these skills and this knowledge in any other way other than through their school experience.

This is what the standards-based reform movement was all about. Ideally, clear and specific standards would present a kind of distillation of core academic goals. Such standards, which would indicate what is to be taught at each grade and suggest a sequence of topics within each grade, would ensure that all students, including the most disadvantaged, would leave school with a solid core of academic learning. These standards would also be the basis for an aligned system of teacher training, curriculum, assessments and interventions, thus assuring that the various parts of the system work together to ensure that all students are learning.

Unfortunately, as states have worked to realize this vision, student curriculum, teacher training, and quality intervention systems have often been neglected. In some cases, high-stakes assessments that are supposedly aligned to vague general standards are all that exist, resulting in a perversion of standard-based reform. Where there are high-stakes assessments but no curriculum or other support, teachers are often pushed to teach to the test. In effect, the assessments work to narrow teachers' instruction, the reverse of what standard-based reform intended.

The more we learn about the process by which knowledge is acquired, the more perverse the narrowing of the curriculum seems to be. As you will hear from Don Hirsch and Don Deshler in a few moments, there is a growing body of research from cognitive science, reading and other fields showing that knowledge builds on knowledge. This research creates a compelling case that a major reason that poor kids fall behind as they move through school is that they enter school with a huge gap in their background knowledge and vocabulary when compared with their more privileged peers. This deficit puts them at an increasing disadvantage as they get older and the material they must read becomes more complex.

Over the past few decades the research community has seen an emerging consensus about how to improve beginning reading instruction, including systematic attention to teaching very young children how to decode words. This was followed by the adoption of new textbooks and professional development that reflected the consensus. As a result, the reading scores of nine-year-olds have been rising for the past 15 years, and I want to stress that because quite often we hear so much negative about what's going

on in our schools. But reading scores, particularly in the lower grades, have been increasing in our public schools for the last 15 years.

Today, though, we want to pay particular attention to what happens to youngsters as they move through school, because what we are seeing is that as kids move into the upper grades, their ability to read with comprehension is not what it ought to be. And, as a result, many students – particularly our disadvantaged students – are leaving school without the ability to read with comprehension.

So what our presenters today will address is what we need to do to help all children – including the most disadvantaged children – become successful readers and successful students. The bottom line in all of this is that we really want to connect research and academia to the classroom. If we are to be successful, then we have to make sure that the insights and advances that research has to offer work to the advantage of our nation's classroom teachers and their students.

So I now want to open this up, but before I do that, I'd like to ask each of you to introduce yourselves very briefly. We'll go around this table, starting with this young man.

NOEL GUNTHER: I appreciate being called young man. I'm Noel Gunther. I'm director of the Reading Rockets in Boulder, Colorado, an LD online project at WETA, which is the PBS station here in Washington.

BURNIE BOND: I'm Burnie Bond with the Albert Shanker Institute.

ANNE SWEET: Hi, everyone. I'm Anne Sweet, with the Institute for Education Sciences.

DENISE TAYLOR: I'm Denise Taylor, the instructional support teacher at Federal Hill Preparatory School in Baltimore, Maryland.

JOE MARTEL: I'm an old man. Joe Martel. I'm retired and I volunteer with the middle school and Federal Hill Elementary School.

TANYA SHUY: I'm Tanya Shuy with the National Institute for Literacy.

GABRIELLE MILLER: I'm Gabrielle Miller. I'm with the Kennedy Krieger Institute.

LAURA KALOI: I'm Laura Kaloi, policy director for the National Center for Learning Disabilities.

BETH FRANKLIN: Beth Franklin, US Department of Education.

MICHELLE CODY: Michelle Cody, Office of Reading First, Maryland State Department of Education.

BARB KAPINUS: Barb Kapinus, National Education Association.

SHIRLEY McCANN: Shirley McCann, George Washington University researcher.

DARLA MARBURGER: Darla Marburger. I'm the deputy assistant secretary for policy in the office of elementary and secondary education of the US Department of Education. I had to give you the typical long federal introduction.

NORMA GARZA: Norma Garza, US Department of Education.

ELIZABETH SIMONS: I'm Elizabeth Simons, Alexandria city public schools. I'm the English language arts curriculum specialist.

MARY ZOLMAN: I'm Mary Zolman, Arlington public schools. I'm an English language arts supervisor.

GAYLE KELLY: I'm Gayle Kelly. I'm with Arlington County public schools. I'm the English language arts reading specialist.

ILENE BERMAN: Ilene Berman, National Governors Association.

LIA SALZA: Lia Salza. I work with Noel at Reading Rockets and LD Online in Golden, Colorado.

MARGIE BELL: Margie Bell, International Reading Association.

CATHY ROLLER: Cathy Roller, International Reading Association.

NANCY MILANEF: Nancy Milanef (ph), teacher, PS 124.

JUDY LAFANTE: Judy Lafante, teacher, PS 124.

KATE WALSH: I'm Kate Walsh, with the National Council on Teacher Quality. It is my pleasure to be here because I worked for Don Hirsch two years ago on precisely the topic of today.

KATI HAYCOCK: Kati Haycock, Education Trust.

DON DESHLER: I'm Don Deshler, University of Kansas.

EUGENIA KEMBLE: Eugenia Kemble, Albert Shanker Institute.

MR. LaCOUR: And because no one told me not to, we're going to start over here also. (Laughter)

RANDY GARTON: Randy Garton, Albert Shanker Institute.

LAURA BROACH: I'm Laura Broach. I'm a reading specialist at Eaton Elementary, DC public schools. Hired by the parents, not DCPS.

PEGGY BRACEWELL: I'm Peggy Bracewell with Teachers Institute.

LISA BERNSTEIN: Lisa Bernstein, Teachers Institute.

CECELIA DANIELS: Cecelia Daniels from Success for All Foundation, and director of Secondary Programs.

LUCY GETTMAN: Lucy Gettman, Reading Recovery Council of North America.

LISA HANSEL: Lisa Hansel, with the American Federation of Teachers.

PAULA BURDETTE: Paula Burdette, with the National Association of State Directors of Special Education.

CLAUS VON ZASTROW: Claus von Zastrow with the Learning First Alliance.

DARION GRIFFIN: Darion Griffin, with the American Federation of Teachers.

LINDA ROHRBAUGH: Good afternoon. Linda Rohrbaugh, reading coordinator with the state improvement grant, DC Public Schools.

TOKS FASHOLA: Toks Fashola, with the American Institutes of Research and Johns Hopkins.

MR. LaCOUR: Okay, over here.

KARIN CHENOWETH: Karin Chenoweth with the Achievement Alliance.

ROSS WEINER: Ross Weiner from the Education Trust.

BARBARA GOMEZ: Barbara Gomez, Institute for Education and the Arts.

MR. LaCOUR: And Ruth, you'll end it?

RUTH WATTENBERG: Ruth Wattenberg, AFT.

MR. LaCOUR: Well, I wanted to welcome all of you and to thank you for taking time out to participate. I also want to recognize a few of the important people here from the US Department of Education; I think they may have introduced themselves already. But Darla Marburger, the deputy assistant secretary for policy in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Okay. And Norma Garza, senior advisor to the assistant secretary, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Okay. And Susan Neuman, who was with us earlier, the former assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education. Where's Susan? She just stepped out.

Well now let's hear from E.D. Hirsch, Jr. He is the founder and chairman of the nonprofit Core Knowledge Foundation, which has helped reshape the curriculum in hundreds of schools around the country, and a professor emeritus of education and humanities at the University of Virginia. He is the author of a number of acclaimed books on education, including his most recent work, *The Knowledge Deficit*, the bestseller *Cultural Literacy, the Schools We Need and Why We Don't Have Them*, and a K-6 series beginning with *What Your Kindergarten Needs to Know*.

He has been elected to the American Academy of Arts and Science, and the International Academy of Education, and is the recipient of numerous honorary degrees and awards, including the AFT's 1997 Quest Award for outstanding contribution to education. He is also a founding member of the board of the Albert Shanker Institute, which is the sponsor of this event today. Don? (Applause)

E.D. HIRSCH: Well, thank you, Nat. First of all, before I start I want to thank the Shanker Institute and Eugenia for putting this on. I also want to thank Ruth Wattenberg for devoting a whole, marvelous issue of *American Educator* –which is enclosed in your materials – to this topic of reading and background knowledge. Nat, I want to thank you for presiding.

And I want to say just a word about Al Shanker, too, because this may be my only chance to address an Al Shanker meeting and say just a word about Al. He was an advocate of the one idea, really, that I've had over the last 25 years. But the thing about Al that differentiated him so much from other readers of my words was that he not only was smart – of course he was wonderfully smart, but he was also well trained as a philosopher, as a logician. As a matter of fact, his library up in the Albert Shanker Institute offices, which are in the AFT headquarters building, is full of big philosophical tomes with underlinings and margin notes and very impressive. He did all the work short of a dissertation for a philosophy degree at Columbia.

And what I think distinguished how Al took what I was saying from most other readers of that work was that he was willing to follow logic whither it leads. If it goes from A to B to C to D to E, and E happens to be a very disagreeable idea – for instance, that we need a common specific grade by grade curriculum for all kids across schools because there's so much mobility – then that's where we have to go, because it's a conclusion that reflects reality. It doesn't reflect sentiment, if the premises you start with are correct.

And the premise that I started with was that the unsaid in speech weighs – far outweighs what is said in speech in writing, and if you haven't got the unsaid, you haven't got the said. It doesn't help to be able to decode because you can't decode what is not said. So that's the limitation of a sort of mechanical or technical approach to reading and language and learning generally.

I thought it would give a sense of the practical implications of this idea if I focused on DC reading scores, just for a moment. It's too depressing to focus for long. The reading scores of 8th graders in DC – and in all of the central cities in the US – are low, and they haven't risen in recent years. My new book explains why. Reading scores at grade 8 are not primarily a function of sounding out letters. Given adequate early reading instruction, by grade 8 reading ability is determined by a person's background knowledge. It depends on background knowledge for a fundamental reason – that is, what is unsaid in writing or speaking and which must be silently understood is just as critical as what is said overtly. So those two facts frame the issue: 8th-grade scores are low because reading comprehension is highly dependent on prior knowledge.

As Nat pointed out, the reading scores of 4th graders are on the rise. And again, I think this is in part thanks to the work of the AFT. The AFT has a whole tradition of pragmatism in improving education, even if that means fighting the establishment view. This was true of Liz McPike, the editor who preceded Ruth Wattenberg at *American Educator*, the AFT's magazine, and her focus on the importance of teaching decoding in the early grades. And this helps to explain the rise in 4th-grade scores. But the research has also shown that what is being tested in 8th-grade reading tests is no longer decoding skill, it's comprehension. Joe Torgeson has done some unpublished, but very significant work to show what's actually emphasized in these reading tests at different grade levels.

I would argue that these 8th-grade reading skills are much, much more important than 4th-grade scores. I mean, in a few years these kids are going to be voters. If they can't read with understanding, then they can't learn high school subjects well. They can't communicate well; they can't participate effectively in the civic sphere or in the economy. And we know from the longitudinal study of youth that adult reading scores correlate highly with a person's life chances. According to the LSY data, if you keep all the other variables constant, the higher your scores on a reading test, the more likely you will be to earn more money and the more likely you will be to stay out of jail. (This doesn't mean that the two are directly correlated, of course.)

But in any case, if it was true that you would do better economically with a higher score on a reading test, if that was true when the LSY data was developed, it's more true than ever now that the world is flat. So 8th-grade reading scores in DC and all of our central cities are a national misfortune, and they predict, I think, national decline unless we do something decisive about them. And even more, they exemplify a kind of tragic injustice that democratic education was supposed to repair from the beginning.

So, just because 4th grade reading scores have gone up, I don't think we should be lulled into thinking that this will translate into improvements in 8th-grade reading. Why they haven't translated – why in fact 8th grade scores have gone down slightly – is one of the conundrums I'll touch on here.

Chapter 5 of my new book, *The Knowledge Deficit*, is called "Using School Time Productively." In it, I offer evidence that, by international standards, our students fall further behind the longer they stay in our schools. That is, our 4th graders compare rather well with 4th graders around the world. By 8th grade, they compare much less well.

So the 120 minutes in each school day apparently are not being used as productively for reading as they might be used. This is something that many people have touched on, but it's where the rubber meets the road. In practical terms, productivity – academic productivity – is the nub of the matter. This is particularly true for disadvantaged children because, as James Coleman showed this in some of his essays, schools are far more compensatory – well, actually he showed it both in his essays and in his early massive work – he showed that the more productive a school is, the better a school is, the more compensatory it is, all things being equal.

So academic productivity is the nub of the matter. If we were to improve our schools' productivity in the use of school time, classroom time, we would solve, I would say, the central problem of education in the country today. If students don't learn much in the course of a year, they will fall behind other students who are learning more. And, not only that, the most disadvantaged will fall furthest behind.

In the book, I argue that the chief reason classroom time isn't used productively is that our schools are dominated by a set of well intentioned but flawed ideas. This has already caused great problems in an initial review of the book in *Teacher* magazine: How could you blame these innocent ideas for the inequities that society has obviously created?

By the way, that's one of the flawed ideas, I believe: to think that it has been determined that poverty will inevitably yield low 8th-grade reading scores. Another is to think of reading as being like typing – a kind of generalized skill that you can just develop. But, if you do what the schools are now doing and spend 120 minutes a day on typing, you would learn to type very, very well. And, of course, you would also be able to type things that you don't understand very well. Once they have learned to decode, children are also able to decode things they don't understand very well. But typing and reading are not the same. That is because of the element of the unsaid.

I won't develop this much further because I don't want to take time away from Don. But, to summarize, general reading ability will be impossible to gain, so long as we operate on these formalistic notions that how-to knowledge is more important than knowing things, knowing stuff. Reading comprehension is dependent on knowing many, many things. And that is my main thesis.

It's a safe bet that everybody here is a good reader. So obviously, there is such a thing as general reading skill and everybody here, I'm pretty darned sure, would do well on a standard reading tests. But you shouldn't be misled by that into thinking that reading is a general ability in a formal sense. It's a hard-earned composite skill that consists of thousands of sub-skills – the skill of reading about the Civil War, the skill of reading about economic policy, about college life, about computer software. Skill in one of these does not automatically give you skill in the other.

As cognitive scientists say, reading comprehension is domain-specific. But if reading is domain-specific, how can there be such a thing as general reading ability? And the answer is that general reading ability requires general knowledge – knowledge of a great many different specific domains. So if we want our 8th graders to be good readers, we will need to provide them with broad general knowledge. There's no other route to general reading proficiency. That bears repeating. There is no other route to general proficiency in reading than the possession of general knowledge.

We know from the work of Betty Hart and Todd Risley that children from advantaged circumstances come to school with a store of knowledge and vocabulary that disadvantaged students lack. From birth, these more advantaged students are surrounded by adults and peers who give them – through the ear, mainly – the knowledge that disadvantaged children aren't getting at home. So, as Nat pointed out, if less advantaged children are also to gain this knowledge, which they will need for reading, the place they are going to gain it is in school. Thus, the productive use of school time is critical.

I will close by coming back to the schools of DC. If you want to achieve productive use of school time, the schools of DC will need to specify with some definiteness the core elements of broad knowledge that 1st graders need to have before they enter 2nd grade – let's say, 50% of the curriculum. And that will have to take place with each subsequent grade. So the teacher won't be faced with backtracking to explain Pilgrims to some students while others, squirming in their seats, will miss out on the chance about learning about Daniel Boone, for example. And you won't spend a lot of time teaching, say, about the Pietists. I know about the Pietists, but that's because I'm academic and that was my period. But I'm trying to make the general point that you have to be selective in the topics you choose, because what we're trying to teach is that realm general back ground knowledge – the kinds of unsaid things that writers take for granted that you know when they write, and which readers have to know to understand what the writers are trying to tell them.

Well, when a school follows both of those principles, of selectivity and specificity, grade by grade, its students will – we know this, we have evidence for this – make long-term gains in reading comprehension. They will systematically be gaining the general knowledge they need. But it's a multi-year project, clearly. It needs to be started as early as possible – something that Susan Neuman was saying just this morning – which means that you have to include generous reading aloud and coherent reading aloud in the very earliest grades.

And in the central cities, the reform needs to go beyond the individual school. This is another point that Shanker was easy with in reaching, but which is very hard for many people to take. This reform needs to go beyond the individual school because the individual school isn't the operative unit in the central city. Students are moving in and out of individual schools, and the most disadvantaged students are moving the most, usually within a district. So there needs to be a districtwide – at a minimum, districtwide – set of very specific content standards, grade by grade. Any educational reform that ignores student mobility is simply writing off a huge number of our neediest students.

So let me close – my last paragraph. In all my years of dealing with this contentious core curriculum issue, I haven't heard a single, valid technical argument against it. The arguments are either scientifically wrong or they're ideological – based either on a how-to conception of reading, where we don't need to specify knowledge, or on an ideological repugnance toward the idea that some central agency should decide the core content of the curriculum.

Now everybody's entitled to his ideology, but since there isn't a good technical or scientific argument against a specific core curriculum, and since real advances in reading comprehension absolutely depend on it, there isn't any other way. We shall have to choose between our dislike of centralized content decisions and our desire to achieve real advances in reading comprehension. Or, to put the stark choice in another way, we shall have to choose between sentiment on the one side and social justice on the other. Thank you. (Applause)

MR. LaCOUR: I want to thank Professor Hirsch.

And now we go to our second Don. Don Deshler is a professor of special education and director of the Center for Research on Learning at the University of Kansas. Don Deshler has spent nearly 40 years working to identify effective instructional strategies for use with struggling adolescents and students with learning disabilities. Dr. Deshler and his colleagues at the Center for Research on Learning have created an international training and dissemination network of more than 900 trainers who provide staff development for schools on educational procedures validated from CRL research.

These include the strategies intervention model, and the learning strategies curriculum which are mechanisms to improve the instructional effectiveness of teachers and the learning success of students with learning disabilities. He is also one of the architects of Reading Next, a vision for action and research in middle and high school literacy, a 2004 report to the Carnegie Corporation by the Alliance for Excellent Education, which helped shine a spotlight on the issue of teen literacy.

It gives me great pleasure to present to you Dr. Deshler. (Applause)

DONALD DESHLER: I thank you. And to the Shanker Institute, it's a real honor to be here and to participate in this conversation on such a vitally important issue. I want to take this opportunity to publicly commend Don Hirsch for the tremendous

contributions that he's made to the dialogue and the thinking within our field for a significant period of time. His critiques are always cogent, his logic is very sharp, and he helps to focus our thinking and to raise questions that we all need to very seriously consider, and I take my hat off to him.

As Nat said in the introduction, I've spent the majority of my life trying to grapple with the challenges that confront us as kids move into middle school, junior high, and high school, but without the benefit of what Don has laid out as being ideally important in their early education. So we've been forced to grapple with the question of what to do for those kids who don't have the background knowledge that is so vitally, vitally important?

I have a few slides to show you that will help, hopefully, to guide my remarks. As we consider where we are today, it's clear that it's a time of great opportunity. The focus on education in public discussion is unparalleled in recent years. But, as Mark Twain said, "To every complex problem, there's a simple solution that doesn't work." I think that could describe a lot of the situation we're dealing with today.

What I'd like to do is sort of go where Don started in terms of expanding on or clarifying the challenge that we are facing. To do so, I'm going to share with you a little – some data from recent research that we've been doing in inner city school districts. And to bring it home, I'd like to have us begin by listening to a young man in 9th grade, Marcus, as he's reading a passage.

(Taped segment of a student who reads very haltingly.)

So how much do you think Marcus got from that passage? Unfortunately what we have heard and seen in that brief paragraph is not uncommon in so many young teenagers in our schools today. And so what I'd like to do is share with you what we've learned in some of our work. In some ways, I'm coming down in total agreement with Don's thesis, and in other points I do vary from some of the arguments that he lays out, and I think that's good for the conversation.

You don't have to read this slide. It just makes the point that what I'm going to share with you is information, based on a large descriptive study that we've just completed in some inner city schools, trying to profile what adolescent readers are like. Now let me try to interpret it for you. What we've done is divide kids randomly into five groups – unsatisfactory, basic, proficient, advanced, and exemplary. We wanted to see what these kids looked like in their performance.

What I want to point out, which unfortunately you can't see, and I'm going to give you a summary slide following this, the yellow box at the top outlines the unsatisfactory and the basic readers. If you could read these figures, what they would tell you is – across a variety of dimensions ranging from listening comprehension, letter and word identification, passage comprehension, word attack, vocabulary, broad reading and so forth – skills are basically flat lined, with kids reading somewhere approximately

between the 7th and 10th percentile in all of those areas. That is for the unsatisfactory and the basic readers.

We can summarize the basic information that has come out of this particular instrument on that test, plus several others, the following way: Number one, poor readers were significantly deficient in all skills that were measured, being one or more standard deviations below the norm. Second, there is no evidence that struggling readers have good word-level skills and only need to focus on comprehension instruction. Third, based on our work, we believe that there is merit in considering a balanced literacy approach to the instruction that we do.

In light of all this, we've laid out a model for adolescent reading that tries to reflect what we have found in schools today and what we need to address instructionally. Namely, there are kids and a lot of them, like Marcus, who do not have basic word recognition skills. And unless those are somehow built up, their ability to gain benefit from the written word is very remote.

The middle box, the middle yellow box says that, yes, there is a vital role that is played by background knowledge – vocabulary, text structure, and syntax. Being able to work with that knowledge and to explain it – to be able to talk about it and to talk to yourself about it – is absolutely vital, as is the skill specified in the last box of executive processes.

So what we are contending is that we need to address the varying needs that kids bring to the table. The driving question that has catapulted our work is: How can we effectively address the broad array of literacy problems within secondary schools? As we see, we have kids who arrive in 7th, 8th, 9th grade who lack sufficient background knowledge, but they also lack decoding skills and strategy. What are we going to do on that?

Well, over time, we've come to learn the importance of establishing a schoolwide framework for improving literacy outcomes to deal with the varying types of kids that come to us. Now, if we take as a given that we want students to be able to deal with higher order thinking as our end goal – to take a broad array of knowledge and combine it and apply it in the solution of novel problems – how do we go about preparing students in such a way that they can do that? We contend that at the basis of it all is a solid language foundation. Don made reference to the work of Hart and Risley, and they underscore the importance of that from day one in a child's life.

If that is absent, we find that the next building block when children move into school, the acquisition of basic skills, is going to be problematic. And if you do not have a solid skill foundation, you're going to have difficulty with the next building block, which is the acquisition of strategies that enable you to navigate both text and oral language. In the absence of these strategies, it is very difficult. As we see with Marcus, the energy that he is investing in decoding the words leaves him with very little energy

and resources to understand what is being said relative to what is being read. And without a rich base of knowledge background, we can't engage in higher order thinking.

We believe there are at least five levels to this. The first is in the delivery of critical subject matter content. We say, at level one, it is the role of teachers to choose and enhance and make understandable critical content knowledge, regardless of the literacy levels that kids have. We can't take secondary school kids who read at the 4th grade level, take them out of the biology class and just wait until they read well enough to understand their biology book. How can that critical content be delivered to them so they can understand it?

We find that there are certain things, which I'm going to share with you, that teachers can do to enable that content to be enhanced and understood, but for some kids it is not sufficient. They don't have those strategies to help them make sense of the content. And so we have found it's helpful if teachers embed within the content that they are teaching some strategies to share with kids: Look, this is how I go about thinking about history or science. Here's how you can do it; let's do this together.

Level three is for those youngsters who cannot benefit from that embedded strategy instruction within the content class. We find that some youngsters are so far behind that they don't have enough opportunity for sufficiently intensive instruction within a content class environment, so we need to look for additional opportunities for intensive instruction in other settings. If you think about the academic building blocks, some kids can't acquire strategies because they don't have the basic skills, and so we may need to look at ways to provide intensive, well-designed skill instruction so that we can make up multiple years of skill deficits within a short period of time because of the rate at which content knowledge is coming to them. And there are some youngsters in every school who do not have the basic core language underpinnings, for whom we may need to think about engaging speech language therapists, and so forth.

And finally, we need to consider alternatives outside of the classroom, before and after school. Because our time is so limited, how can we make up for all that has been lost. So basically, the content literacy continuum says this. There are unique, but very important roles, for each member of the secondary staff relative to literacy instruction – which is not to say that every secondary teacher should function as a reading teacher – and literacy coaches may be necessary, but aren't sufficient.

The other thing it 's saying is this: Some students require more intensive, systematic, explicit instruction in content, strategies, and skills. Basically, the content-literacy continuum is an ebb and flow. It's not that you have level one or two or three kids, or it's a level three class or whatever. But we need to think of this as being dynamic. Let me just focus on level one and then open it up for discussion, because that's where it would be meaningful. But I do want to share with you something that we've been doing to try to enable the acquisition of the critical knowledge that Don makes reference to, when we have kids who don't have the independent skills and strategies to move along with the teacher and the textbook.

One of the challenges is that there is so much content coming. Pat Cross captured it well when she said, if it weren't for students impeding our progress to the end of the term, we could certainly be sure of covering the material. The question, however, is not whether we, as teachers, can get to the end of the text at the end of the term, but whether our students are with us on the journey.

So that raises the question, how can we select critical content? A tack that we've taken – I'm certainly not holding this out as a panacea, but as a way that we've been trying to solve the problem – is what we call content enhancement. That is where teachers identify critical content. Not all content is of equal worth. What is the most critical content? And then, of the content that is critical, what is difficult? What do we predict certain kids within our class are going to have difficulty learning because it is especially abstract, complex, dense, or whatever? It is then incumbent upon the teacher to mediate the leaning of that content so kids can pick it up regardless of their literacy level.

We've developed a variety of content enhancement routines which I will lickety-split through to give you one illustration so we can open it up. These are just a few graphics on thinking about the curriculum. As I said, we can't teach it all. We need to look at – if we think of those stars as being the base of knowledge that we could potentially teach, we need to identify some of the critical pieces of knowledge and learning we want, and they would be represented by the gold stars.

They then come together – it's those things around which courses and units are organized, and each unit is – is grounded on critical ideas that define the content of the unit. But what we need to think about and recognize is that there's some of that knowledge that should be enduring and that all kids need to get and remember. There's some knowledge that it is important to know; and there's some knowledge it's worth being familiar with. All kids need the critical knowledge. There are some kids that will need different types. Ideally all kids would get it all, but that's just not the reality.

So what we spend time doing is going through a process called smarter planning, in which critical information is thought about and then transformed and enhanced. Let me share with you three content enhancement devices that we have developed for teachers to use to showcase critical knowledge for students, and to hopefully bridge the gap when kids are lacking the skills and strategies.

This is an organizer routine. Envision that teachers are launching the new unit with students. So that kids can follow along, it's imperative that they understand the way in which the knowledge is structured and organized. Now everyone gets a blank organizer, and it is filled up in – and co-constructed with the class through an interactive process. And just to point out, there are a host of things that are embedded within these devices from an instructional design standpoint. The key content of the information is organized. How it's structured is pointed out very deliberately to students so they understand how this text and this oral knowledge are organized. Critical guiding

questions are used to focus discussions and to help students think about the knowledge and the information.

Another device for teaching a critical concept is a concept diagram. For example, the Civil War. Again, this is filled up in co-construction with the students. Some of the things that we call upon from the students – we try to tap into their prior knowledge. We help them see the way in which knowledge is categorized hierarchically. We analyze the various kinds of characteristics that help define a key concept that we're teaching, and we discriminate the evaluation by looking at examples and non-examples, and have students engage in that process.

Or we use a comparison table to compare and contrast knowledge. Again, this is co-constructed with students. In this, we clearly point out to students some of the facts and details that are central to understanding this concept. In this case, we're comparing economic conditions in the North and the South. We take a look – we give them a strategy to help guide their thinking through knowledge and to help them process knowledge independent of the teacher, but the teacher models it when they're doing it together. And we use categorical knowledge so that students can understand how you take facts and look for larger categories within which they fit, so they can talk about them and use that information to help solve other problems and to write about that knowledge and information.

The bottom line that what we have tried to do with this is to create a mechanism whereby the goals – or excuse me, the performance of students goes up commensurately. The significance of this graph is what you see here. In this research, we divide kids into at least four groups: low achievers, students with learning disabilities, average achievers, and high achievers. If a teaching routine is to have merit, we should see commensurate gains across those groups. If we don't, certain groups are benefiting from the instruction at the expense of others. And these data are simply to show that – and this is a study within literature, in a Shakespeare unit, of how the gains across those four groups are approximately commensurate.

So with that I am going to stop and I will do so by summarizing my key point in this way. Background knowledge is absolutely essential. Vocabulary is essential. You can see that, if we are to engage kids in higher order thinking, they need both. But they also need the necessary skills and strategies to enable them to navigate that knowledge and information, and we need to find a way to create learning conditions within schools that address the broad array of needs of kids who arrive at school at various levels of proficiency. Thank you. (Applause)

MR. LaCOUR: Now we're going to open for questions. Raise your hand, people around the table, and you'll be called upon.

TOKS FASHOLA: I have a question for both of you. Given that their background knowledge is weak when students come to school, do you have any suggestions or recommendations in terms of the non-school hours? The community, the

people that the children are surrounded with during the day – how can they possibly work with students, formally or informally, so that their background knowledge is enriched? At different levels – in other words, their families, their communities. Thank you.

DR. HIRSCH: I'm just a theorist, but one thing that I would think is that if you have an idea of where this – you know, it depends on the age and level of knowledge of the child. To tutor effectively in that way, it seems to me that you have to have some notion about what's lacking and what is already there. So it just seems – I said I only had one idea, and it comes back to the point that, if you haven't got some notion of where the child should be at a particular grade level with respect to the general knowledge the child has, it's hard to solve the problem.

But if you have that idea – and that's why I created those grade-by-grade books, which people have used in that way. Obviously, you can use any kind of source. But it would be hard to repair the knowledge gaps without having diagnosed what's an important gap and what isn't. So you need that larger concept.

DR. DESHLER: If I might just jump in on that. I think there's a couple of things in addition to those points. Number one, I don't believe we should give up on the parents. I understand the challenges and the difficulties within homes and so forth. That's a powerful message that I think – for example, policymakers can use the power of the pulpit to underscore the importance of oral traditions and talking to kids and so forth. Secondly, we do have the advantage today of powerful educational television, the History Channel, Discovery channel and so forth, that can be leveraged.

If we're going to be engaging in before- and after-school tutoring – I think we are gaining some information on that that not all of it is highly productive. So I think we need to look at what we've learned from that. And the final thing I'd say is, the older kids get, one of the challenges we've got is to get them re-engaged in the reading process. And part of the thing that we've got to make available to kids is engaging materials, to just have them get into the process of reading again and get excited by ideas. And then I would agree with Don that critical knowledge and information has to be built systematically. But we cannot underestimate the power of that motivational problem.

MS. HAYCOCK: If I could just pick up on that, it may fall to us, Don, who – Kati Haycock, Ed Trust. It may fall to those of us who read your work to find the second idea but – (laughter). But actually it seems to me the most useful of your ideas for folks who think about the non-school hours is the topical immersion idea. And that is, if in our reading, in our – in our oral work with kids we're focusing on immersing them in topics, not just in other words in how we normally talk about reading, which is a rich array of literature, but rather sort of like Susan Landry does with the youngest children. I mean, it's focused, it's topical, and it's probably like many of us learn to read. We read all of the books on X and then moved on to all of the books on Y.

So actually thinking about that – and, interestingly, when you look at some of the best after-school programs for adolescents, like citizen schools, that's exactly what they're doing. They're topically focused. They're immersed –

(END SIDE A, BEGIN SIDE B)

DR. HIRSCH: (in progress) What I would just add is that there are a lot of side benefits to what Kati just mentioned, and that is that the children, when they stay on a topic and become familiar with the context, more familiar with context, they are picking up vocabulary at a much faster rate. As a matter of fact, Tom Landauer has done work that shows that we pick up vocabulary four times faster in a familiar than in a non-familiar context. And, of course, teachers of a second language know that very well too. If you want to teach another language, you do it in a familiar context. So, an excellent point. Thank you.

MS. WALSH: May I throw something in here too. Kate Walsh, National Council on Teacher Quality. You know, one of the problems with the reading programs that kids are spending so much time on is that they do precisely the opposite of what we're talking about. They'll change the topic. Even the best ones, like Open Court. They change the topic each week, so the kids never are immersed in a topic. So when teachers are designing read-alouds for their classroom, it's important to stay on a topic for, you know, four to six weeks, rather than a story of the week that they parse apart word-by-word and ask a lot of questions about a 200-word story, instead of sort of getting into the meat of the matter.

MS. KEMBLE: Eugenia Kemble, Shanker Institute. You mentioned that you do have some disagreements, and I'd like to pull those out a little bit. One that I wondered about, and maybe this isn't a disagreement, but let me just put it on the table as an example. When you had your list up there, number four was intensive basic skills instruction. As you were working down to the less proficient, worst readers.

Now would you have included content concentration in that intensive basic skill instruction? Because you had it separated out. So maybe that – and if that's not a difference, what are they?

DR. DESHLER: Very good question. And a poor graphic, that it doesn't reflect that. One of the great challenges we've got with a youngster like Marcus, quite frankly, is finding sufficient materials that are content-rich, that can be used to enable him to practice the skills and strategies that he needs to acquire to read better independently.

Now, at the same time we're teaching him (or her) those basic skills, we shouldn't forget about getting information in through means other than the printed word. You know, that we – I mean, there's this huge knowledge deficit that needs to be made up and we need to be the fill-in. That's the dilemma we've got.

And secondary is, how do you at the same time teach skills or strategies that are lacking and not push the pause button permanently on the content that is coming like waves come in on the ocean? I mean, you've got to be dealing with both. That's why we've done the work in content enhancement, to say, hey, science teachers, history teachers, think deeply about the most critical knowledge to be teaching and then think of ways that it can be refrained and enhanced and taught to kids and engage them so they can get those deep, rich ideas, even though they can't independently read the text. If we don't do that, they're going to get way far behind.

But the other point that I would say, and maybe it's more one of agreement than disagreement, the point of time not being used well is the real challenge we've got, to use the time we have really well. Some of the studies that we have done that look at specific skill and strategy instruction at the secondary level show that that time is not used well. And if there's any time, that has to be soaked for every second that is available, is when we are teaching an 8th grader or 9th grader like Marcus some of those core skills that he or she doesn't have. We can't fritter around.

This one study we did on Fridays. Kids worked hard four days of the week. Fridays was movie and popcorn day. That's 20% of the instructional time. That can't happen. We have to make up multiple grade levels in a short period of time.

MS. MILLER: I'm Gabrielle Miller, Kennedy Krieger Institute. I am a – I read quite a bit of your work, Don, and we're a big fan of the continuing literacy instruction. One of the hats I wear is as an administrator, a school administrator. And another hat I wear is as a teacher trainer. So the teachers that we train really just bite into the content enhancements. It just makes perfect sense and it's very easy for them to do.

I guess I wonder if you could talk a little bit about the continuum in terms of operationalizing it, especially in a general education classroom. I have many, many teacher trainees who come in and say, I want to learn the strategies, I really want to embed this, but I have such variation, and how do we bring this to scale, as you often talk about?

DR. DESHLER: Excellent question. If you recall the slide that I had immediately following the content literacy continuum set, there is an important but unique role for various teachers within a secondary environment. I think one of the things that has been proposed for content teachers is, hey, you need to teach these kids reading skills. Well, if you're going to do that, you're going to sacrifice history and science. That can't be sacrificed. And their expertise is in teaching science and history.

So what we're saying, and this is why we need to really think about and coordinate the various roles that teachers play. Number one, within the content classes. I think there are two basic things content teachers can do to enhance literacy skills. One, select critical content. Secondly, teach it in a learner friendly, enhanced way that includes teaching critical vocabulary.

And the second thing they can do is embed strategies. Strategies are not the centerpiece. They are somewhat a sideshow, but model them for the kids. Here's how I go about learning as a science teacher. Here's how I think about science.

Now where does that intensive strategy instruction take place? We've got to look at – that's a separate set of skills that a teacher needs to teach kids in a highly intensive way in which the instructional methodology is much more explicit and much more direct. The student-teacher ratio, our experience is, can't exceed one to 15 when you're teaching strategies, and we have to get those to a level of proficiency and automaticity and then deliberately generalize those into practicing within the gen ed curriculum. So there has to be dialogue between those strategy teachers and the content teachers so they can prompt their use in dealing with science and social studies.

Basic skill level, again, we have to do screening. As kids enter middle school or high school and figure out how many kids are reading below the 3rd grade level. And then we need to mobilize our resources staff-wise so that we can provide that intensive instruction. If we don't – you know, we've heard there's two ways to be baptized. You can be sprinkled or you can be immersed. You don't close the gap, skill-wise, strategy-wise, by sprinkling kids.

MS. MILLER: I guess what I often worry about too is that as the administrator I see relatively limited resources of 50 teachers. Maybe I can't get all 50 trained in everything and I worry that this will degenerate into, well, that's a level one class and that's a level two class, and we're back to where we were. So it's just – I don't know that there's a good answer. I agree. I think that's – I agree with what you're saying, but I worry a little bit that it's going to recycle back to the old levels.

DR. DESHLER: That risk is there.

MS. MARBERGER: You started off today's discussion saying that the research that we have out there is not necessarily what's happening. But what's actually happening in the classroom doesn't always reflect what the research says, and with that in mind, that's certainly a concern and a focus of ours, a scientifically based research. We want the instruction to be based on that. Our teacher-to-teacher initiative also focuses on that.

But really, how well are we doing in our educator preparation programs at applying that research and making it a part of that higher ed delivery system so that our newly trained teachers are going with the best and most cutting edge knowledge?

DR. HIRSCH: Well, I have to say, I taught in an education school. I'm not currently teaching in any university, having retired. But I taught at a school of education and I know something about it from the inside. Nothing that I have learned on the inside has changed my view that I got from the outside, which was that there is a resistance in a lot of quarters in what teachers are taught, to the idea of specifying content, grade by grade. And in fact, that's one of the main arguments.

Now, if you believe as I do that research leads you – if there is a body of background knowledge that's needed for reading, and that knowledge can be identified as it is by every writer who writes for a general audience, then it follows that it's the duty of the schools to teach it, and the way to teach it is to define it, and then not to repeat it in various ways.

So you're led – the only research that I can think of that actually clarifies why this is good and why this research defends it is our international comparisons. Because most of the countries that do far better than we do academically do have that kind of structure. So there is a lot of research defense of that, but it goes quite against what you might call "the child-centered point of view" that's taught to our teachers in schools of education. Other people know more about this than I do, but I certainly think that that's a point that needs to be challenged within our schools of education, the need for specific knowledge, grade by grade.

Don may have more.

DR. DESHLER: The only thing I would say is I think there is – we speak about the gap, the research to practice gap. I think one of the big gaps for that exists is within the universities. I've spent the majority of my educational career there. We have not been as effective as we should be and we really have a lot of work to do to take what is being learned through research and translating it into our teacher preparation programs. There are some pretty significant pressures that schools of ed are under because of state regulations and limited credit hours and so forth that make it very challenging. But we have a long way to go and can do a much better job.

MS. McCANN: Shirley McCann, George Washington University, graduate school of education. I'd like to respond to several, your question and also your comment. I think that there are two issues that we're dealing with. I think at the university level we're very compartmentalized, so if you're a secondary teacher and you're majoring in math, you're majoring in science, and you go out in the schools with a certificate, you're very content-oriented. And the elementary teacher seems to be a little more eclectic because their training is not as specific, although they have another issue because they're not as in depth as you might find a secondary person to be trained.

But if you look at the attrition of the schools and you look at the teachers that are leaving, it's that teachers that of their third, fourth and fifth year, and you wonder what's going on because it seems like they're very confident, very capable of doing what they've been trained to do. First year they have induction training, most school districts. Even the urban school districts have induction training — even some mentoring in the DC schools. I'm working on a contract with them. We have mentoring for first-year teachers.

What happens after that, third, fourth, fifth, schools then ask them, well, let's do a core of knowledge kind of initiative, or across-the-curriculum strategies. And teachers are not really trained to think that way. So I think that there are several things that need

to happen. First of all, I think there needs to be talked about the strategy classes, or strategy teachers.

We just finished with IRA a whole coaching effort. We spent a year looking at – and Kathy can respond more to that, of looking at across disciplines how coaches can help in terms of making different disciplines work together and having more of a learning community. I think part of it is that teachers have not been trained to do that. So it's not necessarily the teacher's at fault or the universities. I think that there needs to be more efforts when we talk about spending funding. And I think now with No Child Left Behind we're looking more at the classroom teacher and saying, let's provide teacher training so that they think along those lines, across disciplines, working together, looking at core knowledge in relationship to the strategies, rather than strategies in isolation or a special ed teacher doing the strategies.

That's just my thought.

MR. LaCOUR: Anyone else? At the very end of the table.

MS. ZOLMAN: Mary Zolman, English language arts supervisor, Arlington County Public Schools. In talking about consistency within schools, public schools, and just touching on teacher training. But there is – seems to me there is no consistency in teacher training across universities and colleges, that sort of – I mean, I interview a lot of teachers, and when you're interviewing a brand-new teacher, maybe even with a certification in reading and you ask them to tell you a little bit about the national reading panel report and you get a blank look, it's a little bit scary. Not that they should recite it, but that they don't know the basics. In other places it's like somebody's coached a candidate before the interview because they know so much.

So I think we need to – I don't know how to even do it, but look at the consistency or the continuity across universities and colleges so that the students who come out with a reading endorsement, for example, come out with a core of knowledge about teaching reading.

MS. WALSH: Don's motioned to me because he's on my advisory board. I have to put in a shameless plug because back here on Monday the National Council of Teacher Quality will be presenting the findings of a major study on what educational schools are teaching about reading or not teaching about reading, and what elementary teachers aren't learning. So we get more of the decoding issues, probably a little bit more than the later vocabulary and comprehension, but that's certainly the national reading panel findings are the focus of what we're talking about.

MS. CODY: In Maryland we've had the opportunity to really look at the whole idea of teacher preparation, and one of the things that we've done really beginning in 2000, before we began to embark on Reading First, was to look at what that core knowledge was in terms of instruction that teachers needed to have. So we developed reading courses that are required for all teachers in Maryland for certification and also for

re-certification, two of four of which are at the elementary certification level, two at the secondary level, which look at specifically the secondary level, reading in the content area.

To help our secondary teachers be able to address the whole idea of the instruction of reading skills throughout any content that's being taught, and that's worked very well for our teachers, especially as many of them have gone up for re-certification after several years of teaching. Now with Reading First we went back and looked at our four elementary courses and redesigned those so that they include a very strong SBRR component. Those courses now have to be approved. The local universities actually write their course syllabi, submit them to us for approval so that we can ensure that there are some things within that body of knowledge that teachers are learning consistently in all of the institutions that are teaching reading courses in the Maryland colleges and universities, which has really worked to help that situation some.

I think we're still challenged with the quality of what's being offered, and we're still challenged with how much of it that's on the syllabi is really actually being taught. So that's probably our next area to really focus in on.

MS. HAYCOCK: I know we're talking about reading, but I was really curious as I listened to both of you about the role of writing in reinforcing all this. I had a fascinating ride with a Pakistani cab driver not so long ago who was railing about his daughter, who was at Northern Virginia Community College in a remedial writing course. He said, you know, in my country students have a syllabus, they read it and were asked to write about it. He said, here it's write about your favorite season; write about your summer vacation. Our staff calls these the write about your favorite piece of furniture writing prompts.

But for many of us, sort of writing is the way we make content our own. So the question is, as we try to build content, background knowledge, reading, what is the role of writing here and how do we help teachers harness that other strategy?

DR. HIRSCH: I agree with you, Kati, and what I do say about – I have to again be humble because I'm not a classroom teacher. I don't operationalize, as they say it, these ideas. But what is very clear is that the ability to write and the ability to communicate in formal speech to large groups are structurally the same, linguistically the same. I mean, when you're writing, it's an unseen audience, under normal circumstances. Or it's like doing a broadcast on the radio, it's like speaking to a group like this over a microphone. These are structurally the same as writing. You have to be – so children need to learn the explicit conventions that are required by that situation.

Actually I devote quite a lot of space to that issue in this book, but I completely agree. Not to mention the tactile – the advantage of automating the writing itself. But – and what I recommend there, and I would like to see it supported, it does make sense to me, is before children are able to write, they should be asked to talk to their class as a whole and to discuss in that kind of formal setting, because structurally that's the same as

the writing process. It's not just the process itself. It has a linguistic dimension to it that is different from ordinary immediate speech.

DR. DESHLER: Our work really underscores the fact that integrating writing into the literacy experience is critical. And which I did not go into, but some of those graphics teachers use to extend kids' knowledge of that, to have them write about that content knowledge. Those graphics help to serve the organizational process for them.

A critical role, though, that I think for teachers – for us not to under-estimate that subject matter teachers can play, and that is the connective language that is used to help make arguments within a subject area. When I say connective words, such as whereas, or nevertheless, and so on. These are not necessarily – they are not content-rich words, but to help structure arguments and to think about the content, they are vital.

And our research tells us for low-achieving kids, children especially with learning disabilities, they lack that kind of knowledge, and it has to be explicitly taught, or the kids cannot engage in that higher order thinking that I made reference to in the Building Blocks: Academic Competency.

MR. LaCOUR: Ruth?

MS. WATTENBURG: Yes, I want to go back to elementary and make kind of a comment and kind of a question. Ruth Wattenburg, AFT.

It seems to me we came from a period, you know, 10, 15 years ago when there was not a lot of awareness or acceptance of the importance of beginning reading skills. And then we went through a period where we had the NICHD reports and we had a lot of exposure of them. We had Reading First, before that we had the Clinton reading program. Now we have No Child Left Behind that's pushing on the reading. And as a result there has been this huge effort to improve beginning reading skills. And I think it shows up – as Nat said, 4th grade reading scores really do seem to be genuinely on the incline all over the place. And yet, as Don said, it's not showing up at the 8th grade, and he has a very compelling reason why that is the case.

So what I'm concerned about is sort of in education there's always – you know, we're so prone to these pendulum swings. So we finally have beginning reading taught well. Now there's, I hope, a growing awareness of the importance of the content knowledge, and there's an importance not to turn this into a pendulum swing but to say, yes, the beginning reading skills are very, very important to teach. We're beginning to get it. I don't want to drop that. We are beginning to get it and get it well. And yet we also need to do the background knowledge.

I know, Don, you have talked a bit about this, about how in this environment where there's such a push on reading, how you can sort of start to merge them. Maybe others could talk as well about how we can try to prevent the pendulum swing and try to

get this integrated at the lower grade level so that when they get to be secondary kids we don't have these really terrific problems that the other Don was talking about.

DR. HIRSCH: That was a very shrewd remark. I'm wondering, I can expatiate and say, yes, I agree, and I think that – how do you avoid – I don't think – everybody is filled with the idea of phonemic awareness, as people have observed. They're teaching phonemic awareness until it's coming out of everybody's ears. But I hope there will never be now – oh, dear. I shouldn't say that because I'm told that the ideas of the NPR panel are not really very widely adopted after all, that there's still a sort of subterranean anti-phonics impulse in the schools that prevents it from being made operational. I see some nodding faces.

So I certainly agree. You mustn't forget that. You can't forget that or neglect it. But we do need to import content down into the 120 minutes that are now being spent on something called reading because the paradoxical result is that reading scores will not, in the later grades, go up if we continue to do that. So we have to find means of doing that.

DR. DESHLER: You said it well in terms of the pendulum swing. We've all experienced that. I would go back to where I started. I think if we don't focus on the importance of balance in the work that we're doing – that is, kids need sound skill and strategy foundations in fluency and proficiency there if they are to navigate the printed word. But they have to have meaningful, well-designed printed words to navigate. And it has to happen all the way along the continuum. It's not an either-or. Until I think we recognize that basic fact, we're going to get whiplash.

MR. LaCOUR: Well, I think we're going to end at this point of time, which is the time to end. But I want to thank Burni Bond. Raise your hand. She's worked very, very hard to put this together, along with Genie and Ruth, and so I want to thank the Shanker Institute. It's been great.

But we certainly want to close by saying thanks to our two presenters. They've been outstanding. They're doing outstanding work – (applause) – and we want them to keep plugging because we need it. To me what this has been all about today – I did two sessions. We were saying our students really need to leave school with the ability to read, and that reading includes reading with comprehension. And that too many students today are not at that point. But we have begun to make some progress, in that in recent years we've helped kids to decode. But still that's not enough because there are a number of kids that are decoding but they are not reading with comprehension.

We find that we've made a little bit more progress at the early grades, and what is truly needed here is a rich base of knowledge that begins down in the earlier grades such that it continues all the way through so that when the kids get to secondary school, they can handle more complex things. And that's along with the skills and the strategies. And I agree that we need to pull all this together.

So I want to thank you. I think it's been a very enlightening discussion. Thank you very much. (Applause)

(End of event)